

FRANCIS THOMPSON:  
THE POET OF EARTH IN HEAVEN

*A Study in Poetic Mysticism and  
the Evolution of Love-Poetry*

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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FRANCIS THOMPSON  
ABOUT THE TIME OF WRITING 'THE HOUND OF HEAVEN'

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By R. L. Mégroz

*'Not how the universe is, but that it  
is, is the mystical.'*—WITTGENSTEIN

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TO  
ARTHUR ST. JOHN ADCOCK

## PREFACE

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A BOOK which takes as wide a field as this one does (to say nothing of the labour it has involved) will, I hope, be sufficient excuse for an attempt to placate and also to help the reader. The work of Francis Thompson seemed to me, the more I studied it, to call for an unusually comprehensive picture of its wide background in poetry and religion. Thompson is an amazing phenomenon, whatever the reader's individual response to his poetry may be. As the fruit of a continually widened field of reading began to ripen in the somewhat meagre sunshine of an impecunious journalist's spare time and energy, the conviction grew that to write a useful book on Thompson at this time of day it was desirable to make more than mere references to the spiritual background of such a poet. The reader will therefore observe that the theme of the following chapters continually widens out, somewhat like a fan, the handle of which is the first chapter. From relevant biographical facts one moves out a little to the poet's prose, which is the nearest approach to his conversation we have. From that first impression of an original mind taking hold of the world, one passes to the art by which the profound experience is given a concrete form of beauty. But so much is implied in this creative transubstantiation that a glance at the poet's technique is but a step across the threshold of the subject. Some intellectual signposts being a necessity, I chose a succession of poets whose work has significant affinities or contrasts with Thompson's. By bringing before the reader's mind those elements already existing in English poetry which most impressed me by their relationship

with Thompson's utterance I hoped to share more completely my experience. The chapters therefore which are headed with the names of other poets are not meant as little essays on those poets, but as extensions of the study of Francis Thompson. Francis Thompson is one of the greatest mystical poets of English, and therefore of European literature. If one begins the adventurous exploration of the poetry of Christian love, very soon in one's mental travels the focus shifts from English literature to Latin civilization, and that is a rich amalgam of pagan and Christian elements. Donne and Crashaw alone ensure the discovery of the middle ages. Shelley and Patmore will not allow us to ignore Greek sources. In trying to trace the links between the mediæval literature and the renaissance literature one inevitably discovers that half the Greek influence was Asiatic in origin, and that this half has the same character as the decadent pagan art and religion which was absorbed by mediæval Christianity and transmuted into an energizing stream of romance. No appreciative reader of Francis Thompson's poetry can fail to realize the strain of oriental opulence which is that pagan life transfigured by countless poets and mystics.

I may hope for indulgence from non-Catholics for the profound sympathy with the æsthetic element of Catholicism reflected in this study, a sympathy which will I hope prevent Catholic readers being annoyed to find in a study of Francis Thompson so many pre-Christian elements of modern poetry insisted upon. Nature poetry, for instance, is usually regarded as a typically modern phenomenon, but it is only a secular version of what used to be religious in pagan poetry of ritual and mystery plays. The mere men-



tion of such sources surely finds immediate confirmation in one's knowledge of Thompson's mystical pageant of beauty. The key to such a scheme of criticism is offered by Baron Friedrich von Hügel, who summarizes Chapter One of his Introduction to *The Mystical Element of Religion* in this way:

THE THREE CHIEF FORCES OF WESTERN  
CIVILIZATION

- a. The First of the Three Forces: Hellenism, the Thirst for Richness and Harmony.
- b. The Second of the Three Forces: Christianity, the Revelation of Personality and Depth.
- c. The Third Force: Science, the Apprehension and Conception of Brute Fact and Iron Law.
- d. Summing up: Hellenism or Harmonization, Christianity or Spiritual Experience, and Science or Acceptance of a Preliminary Mechanism, all three necessary to Man.'

When this fine critic proceeds to expound 'an enigma of life: the Universal and Abiding does not move the will; and what does move it is Individual and Evanescent', he affords to poetic criticism the ground on which to explain the necessity of the poet to religion. That is an essential part of the scheme of this study.

I am anxious to return thanks to Mr. Wilfrid Meynell for the privilege of being able to reproduce the facsimile of a sheet of 'The Mistress of Vision' and the pictures of the little girls who inspired some of Thompson's loveliest poetry. For helpful suggestions and exchange of opinions I must also thank my friend Mr. Daniel O'Connor; Father John O'Connor, by whose very kind permission I have reproduced in

full the interesting Catholic commentary on 'The Mistress of Vision' which he published in 1918; the Right Rev. G. A. Burton, Bishop of Clifton; MM. Valery Larbaud, Auguste Morel, and Paul Claudel; and especially the Rev. Richard de Bary, author of *Franciscan Days of Vigil*. My indebtedness to the late Everard Meynell's richly packed 'Life' of the poet needs no stating; it is a book which no admirer or student of Thompson will ever be able to do without. My acknowledgments and thanks are also due to Thompson's publishers, Messrs. Burns and Oates, and to the manager of *The Nation and Athenæum*, the marked files of which I had to consult.

# CONTENTS

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PREFACE . . . . .	vii
<i>Chapter I</i>	
THE MAKING OF THE REED . . . . .	17
<i>Chapter II</i>	
THE CRITIC AND PROSE WRITER . . . . .	34
<i>Chapter III</i>	
THE ARTIST . . . . .	50
<i>Chapter IV</i>	
HIS IMAGINATIVE TYPE . . . . .	75
<i>Chapter V</i>	
COVENTRY PATMORE . . . . .	87
<i>Chapter VI</i>	
CRASHAW . . . . .	108
<i>Chapter VII</i>	
SHELLEY . . . . .	125
<i>Chapter VIII</i>	
DONNE AND ST. AUGUSTINE . . . . .	145
<i>Chapter IX</i>	
THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH . . . . .	161
<i>Chapter X</i>	
NATURE POETRY . . . . .	177
<i>Chapter XI</i>	
SCIENCE AND SANCTITY . . . . .	197

# CONTENTS

## *Chapter XII*

POETRY AND CHILDHOOD . . .	211
----------------------------	-----

## *Chapter XIII*

BEDOUIIN AND SPANISH ROMANCE . . .	229
------------------------------------	-----

## *Chapter XIV*

THE SPIRITUALIZING OF LOVE . . .	244
----------------------------------	-----

## *Appendix I*

'THE MISTRESS OF VISION' : A COMMENTARY BY THE REV. JOHN O'CONNOR, S.T.P. . . .	265
--	-----

## *Appendix II*

A LETTER FROM ROBERT BROWNING . . .	275
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## *Appendix III*

BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	276
------------------------	-----

## *Appendix IV*

SOME OF THE POET'S SECOND THOUGHTS . . .	280
INDEX . . . . .	283

# ILLUSTRATIONS

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FRANCIS THOMPSON:

*Frontispiece*

ABOUT THE TIME OF WRITING 'THE HOUND OF  
HEAVEN'

VIOLA MEYNELL:

AS THE POET KNEW HER

*To face page 30*

FACSIMILE OF ORIGINAL HOLOGRAPH MANUSCRIPT OF  
STANZAS FROM 'THE MISTRESS OF VISION'

*Between pages 64 and 65*

FRANCIS THOMPSON AT 19

*To face page 126*

MONICA (LEFT), AND SYLVIA (MADELINE) :

THE MEYNELL SISTERS OF 'SISTER SONGS'

*To face page, 216*

FRANCIS THOMPSON:  
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# CHAPTER I

## THE MAKING OF THE REED

---

*'Adversity is the mainspring of self-realization.'*—DOSTOIEFFSKY.

NINE days before Christmas of 1859, there was an uneasy, breath-suspending excitement at Number 7 Winckley Street, Preston, Lancashire, a mean house in an ugly street, the home of a medical practitioner named Charles Thompson. A busy, harassed, thin, rather dour but generous man, whose straitened resources indicated the cause of his popularity as a doctor with the poor. On this ironically eventful day his wife had given birth to as unpromising a youngster as a proud father, and medical man at that, could well take into his arms without misgivings. The doctor at that moment felt the painful memory stirring of this boy baby's elder brother, whose woeful acquaintance with the world had been prolonged no more than a day. Thus their second child became their eldest and only son; born in anxious hope, he was to be their greatest parental failure.

Charles Thompson's wife had the makings in her of a worldly failure, and before she linked her unstable, rebellious, affectionate personality to that of the firm, slow mind and deep feeling of her husband, life had, with very similar circumstances, made a first essay of the cruel operation it was to perform on the soul of her son. Mary Turner Morton was born in 1822, the daughter of a bank clerk who moved in 1851 from Chelsea to Manchester. Three years later she became engaged to the son in a Roman

Catholic family. It was a revelation to her own family of a strong inclination to the Roman Catholic Church. They opposed her intentions and inclinations with the strength which such internecine family differences can call forth. Her fiancé died soon afterwards, and she made an impetuous attempt, which failed, to enter the novitiate. She became a governess to preserve her independence, returning to Manchester on that footing until she met Dr. Thompson and finally found a refuge in his controlled character. Charles Thompson was himself a convert to Rome, caught up in the full after-tide of the Oxford Movement. Their second child they christened with the illustrious name of Francis, not dreaming that he should add to its lustre; nor could they see in the name of St. Ignatius's Church, where he was baptized, the name of the last of *his* children that would be given to the world, a book on the saint full of the strong personality that was developing behind the slovenly outward appearance of a failure more and more evident as the boy approached manhood. There were but faint indications of any sort of literary inclination in the family, and those were confined to two of Charles Thompson's brothers: Edward Healy Thompson, a controversial theologian whose works were well known to those interested in the ecclesiastical and theological movements of fifty years ago, and John Costall Thompson, who had a small book of poems, *A Vision of Liberty*, privately printed in 1848. Everard Meynell declares that *A Vision of Liberty* and the sonnets indulged in by Edward Healy Thompson (some of which appeared in *Merry England*) 'show that not a dozen such rhyming uncles could endow a birth with poetry'.



But Francis no doubt inherited the capacity for religious feeling through his father, and the consistency of principle which can be seen to unify the poet's life to an extraordinary degree. The impulsive emotion and glowing imagination seem to have reached him, so far as such elements do reach the individual by inheritance, through his mother. There was a tendency to some constitutional weakness, which in Francis became consumption, and which caused the death of one of his sisters in infancy as well as his brother, though a great deal of information would be needed to ascertain how it entered the family. The poet was inclined to trace his physical as well as his mental traits to his mother; but he was probably more conscious of affinities with her. Judging by her more indulgent nature it was probably due to her easy-going ways that the boy was able to bury himself in reading at home, so that at seven he had steeped himself in Shakespeare and other poets found in the book cupboard. Of the two sisters who grew up with him, one fulfilled the abortive ambition of her mother to become a nun. Two of her aunts became nuns. This unworldliness of the religious sense does not seem to have been reflected in Charles Thompson; his character was inclined to a principled austerity and the finding of salvation in doing the world's work. The dreamy unpractical nature seems to have been Mrs. Thompson's.

The retiring, phantasy-making tendency was encouraged by the boyhood of Thompson, which was spent entirely with his two sisters. He shared their games, and he has told us with what zeal he played with dolls and made of them the first models of his goddess, a fact the significance of which is ignored by

the psychoanalyst quoted below.<sup>1</sup> Yet Thompson in 'The Fourth Order of Humanity' recognized it: 'But ineluctable sex declared itself. I dramatized them, I fell in love with them; I did not father them; . . .' He attended a convent school with his sisters, and the lessons were material for his imaginative games at home. This was in Ashton-under-Lyne, to which his father had moved from Preston in 1864. In 1870, when he was about to be sent to Ushaw College, his mother gave him a bust of Shakespeare, a gift significant of her share in his education, as was the later gift of 'The Opium Eater' three or four years before his disappearance into the immense darkness of London. The eleven-year-old boy sent to the college of Ushaw near Durham from a home where he had already, like the Shelley he described, 'fled into the tower of his own soul', was to experience the fate of that 'little St. Sebastian', receiving a full share of the torments which boys with devilish ingenuity know how to inflict on such traitors to communal uniformity of manners and sentiment. The shy, untidy, unobservant, unpunctual boy was a schoolfellow of Henry, the son of Coventry Patmore, his future friend and monitor. But the failure to make friends with him, or with another remarkable contemporary, Lafcadio Hearn, or with others, was the external sign of the growing pressure of tragic destiny. Reports in 1872 of his progress praised his Latin and his English especially. Dr. Thompson was informed that Frank's English composition 'was the best production from a lad of his age which he (the English master) had ever seen in this seminary'. Further successes in Latin and English followed,

<sup>1</sup> See p. 221.

but 'of his Arithmetic, Algebra, and Geometry the less said the better'. His curious crab-wise, sleep-walking, oblivious kind of progress noted by people who met him long afterwards in London was already a characteristic to impress the memory of those who saw him at the college, which he entered from the seminary in 1874. He had shared in the ritual ceremonies at seminary and college, feeding his imagination with the processions and tapers and decorated altar and Marian hymns, all the richly significant acted poetry of the liturgy. But his failure to express himself outwardly in spite of scholastic success brought the disastrous letter in June 1877 from the President to Dr. Thompson, a letter which must have been a heavy blow to the father as well as the son. The conclusion was that Frank was not meant for the Priesthood. The boy was charged with 'a natural *indolence*'; but it was not indolence, it was a failure of contact between his inner world and the world of clocks and watches and jobs to be done.

The return home in July 1877 deepened the separation for he was more on the defensive and had around him the tokens and the companions of his former play of imagination. But he passed with distinction in Greek a test examination for admission to Owens College, Manchester, as a student of medicine. For six years the aimless pretence was kept up, and it ended in the complete alienation of his father.<sup>1</sup> Except a few scattered scientific facts, which

<sup>1</sup> Wilfrid Blunt, describing a long conversation with Thompson, August 26, 1907 (*Diaries*, Vol. 2), records that the poet told him: 'It was a mistake to suppose that his father had treated him harshly. The fault had been his own and a misunderstanding. He had thought that his father insisted on his studying medicine; this was a mistake,

as a poet he afterwards treasured, and a considerable knowledge of cricket gained by assiduous attendance at the Old Trafford ground, the only effect of the six years' daily travelling to Manchester from Ashton was a habit of using public libraries as a study. His biographer quotes a description of the already perilously unhealthy young man at this time, which is a fair parallel with earlier and later impressions made upon observers. Those who remember him, Mr. Saxon Mills wrote, 'will recall the quick short step, the sudden and apparently causeless hesitation or full stop, then the old quick pace again, the continued muttered soliloquy, the frail and slight figure'.

Something should perhaps be allowed for unconscious distortion of the past by such vivid accounts of the appearance of an unimpressive young man, when recalled more than a quarter of a century later by contemporaries who had learnt in the meanwhile that the young man was the future poet known to fame. The 'frail and slight figure' in Mr. Saxon Mills' description seems a mixture of memory and of

it was his mother (meaning his stepmother) and her friends that desired it. If he had spoken openly to his father telling him how repugnant the details of doctoring were to him he would not have insisted, but as he did not speak, his father did not know and he acquiesced in what was arranged for him. His repugnance was a physical one which he could not overcome. The dissection of dead bodies he had partly got over, but the sight of blood flowing he could never endure. . . . "As a boy of seventeen" he said "I was incredibly vain; it makes me blush now to remember what I thought of myself. Neither my father nor my mother had the least appreciation of literary things or the least suspicion that I had any talent of that kind, but I was devoured with literary ambition; all my medical studies were wasted because I would not work, but ran off from my classes to the libraries to read."

later impression. Thompson's figure was frail, but until disease and privation had ravaged him that may not have been so unavoidable an impression as it became in his London days. The portrait of Thompson in his twentieth year is a very valuable record for posterity, because it shows characteristics essential to his personality which in his later appearance are not observable without such earlier signs of what to look for. It is not a weak face, the face of this youth upon whom the dying poet looked back with a sigh of 'incredibly vain'. There are signs of the great mental energy and probing power of contemplation in the eyes and brow ; and underneath the signs of a keenly sensuous nature, such as usually accompanies a tuberculous constitution, there is the framework so to speak of that enduring strength which is passive rather than positive and which seems to be commoner in the Slav than in Western Europeans. But nothing is proved more clearly by this unsentimental record of the poet as he was than the absurdity of confusing his physical sufferings (which would have killed off the person of average strength) and his powerful phantasy-making mind with femininity and absence of virility. It is possible to see the poet of 'Sister Songs' and 'Love in Dian's Lap' passing from youth to maturity in the portrait as frontispiece here; but, supposing one unable to understand how such poetry is written and what are the creative motives for the poetic delight in spiritual loveliness, a study of the man's external self will help to guard against the fatuous notion that what is called feminine tenderness in poetry implies absence of virility in the poet. This fallacy is almost sure to be repeated in connection with Francis Thompson. Wilfrid Blunt said it in

print, and a psychoanalyst has said it in the official organ of the medical psychologists.

So far as the evidence afforded us by photographs and biographical records link up into a chain, the course of Thompson's career after his initial failure to enter the priesthood at Ushaw is that of a man doomed to his earthly purgatory. The only saving strand which held between the days before and the days after his dread initiation was his resilient energy of mind. It was turned inward to a degree which the world pronounces morbid, but it continued to absorb external impressions, turning them into the stuff of ever more splendid dreams. From the poetry shelves of free libraries already in Manchester he would vary the activity of his outwardly indolent life by wanderings into museums and art galleries, garnering something new to feed that Frankenstein's monster, his imagination. Such fresh pabulum was the 'Vatican Melpone', a sculptural cast which in after years he recalled in prose poetry.

'Already he had been thrice in love' his biographer says 'with the heroines of Selous's Shakespeare, with a doll, with a statue.' They were indeed the precursors of the girl who saved him though she did not save herself from the hard streets of London; of a beautiful and distinguished woman-poet who was heavened above all the rest; of a sparkling but deep-natured young lady, daughter of the brilliant Mrs. Hamilton King. The daughter's eventual marriage smote Thompson with a remorseful disappointment after his skies had grown less murky. And there was the village girl at Pantasaph, excuse sufficient for the sequence entitled 'A Narrow Vessel'.

The beginnings of the laudanum habit seem to

date from a serious illness in 1879, a year before his mother's death. His admiration and fellow-feeling for the author of *The Confessions of an Opium Eater*, coupled with what his medical studentship had taught him, and Manchester's character as an opium-den, foreshadowed the final break with the disappointed father and the sudden departure for London in 1885. His little personal belongings, except a Blake and an Æschylus, all sold to buy opium, his fare to London asked for by letter from Manchester, and addressed to him at the Post Office, he came to the metropolis as if bent on reliving De Quincey's life. His pitiful efforts to earn a livelihood in London; his changing lodgings, from doss-houses to shelters, from shelters to the embankment-seat exposed to 'the abashless inquisition of each star', reflected his strange employs as porter of books; newsvendor; watcher of cabs; hawking pencils, and then matches; messenger to the kindly Mr. McMaster, churchwarden of St. Martin-in-the-Fields and keeper of a bootmaker's shop in Covent Garden. He did not, like his saintly namesake, need to court the Lady Poverty; but only a poet who was something of a saint could have been preserved through those dark days of starvation and drug-taking and cruel exposure. One of the last of his heroic rallies against the forces of destruction was devoted to rewriting a faded manuscript of an essay on 'Paganism Old and New', and with that valiant defence of Christian civilization he made another bid for life. Using for postage all but his last halfpenny, which was needed to buy two boxes of matches for stock-in-trade, he posted the essay and some verses, to the editor of *Merry England*. This was one of the most interesting magazines of its time,

and regarded as in the van of progressive Catholicism; a magazine moreover to which his successful uncle, Edward Healy, was a contributor, and one in which he had already experienced a contact with an atmosphere in which he was soon to live. Besides his uncle, Thompson might have read there work by Cardinal Manning, Lionel Johnson, Hilaire Belloc, St. John Adcock, Sir William Butler, Coulson Kernahan, Coventry Patmore, W. H. Hudson, Katherine Tynan, J. G. Snead-Cox, Aubrey de Vere, and Wilfrid Scawen Blunt.<sup>1</sup> The list is eloquent. One more dread crisis, this time an attempt to kill himself with a dose of laudanum, interrupted by what he afterwards described as a warning voice and vision of Chatterton, and his meeting with the one editor in London who could have prevailed over his passive hostility to the world preserved for us those 'withered dreams',

<sup>1</sup> Among the things he may have read in *Merry England* is a sonnet in the May '88 number which contained his 'Dream Tryst'. His 'Paganism Old and New' appeared in the June '88 issue. But in the May number 'The Isthmus' by J. Eastwood Kidson is a sonnet good enough to have interested Thompson, and it is almost certainly a suggestion for the lines in 'The Hound of Heaven', 'I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds', etc., which are quoted below, on page 71. The suggestive parts (nearly the whole) of the sonnet are as follows:

Some vision dim of God's eternity  
 And the less shadowy now, which death divides,  
 Some vague conception of those parted tides,  
 Were caught in wonder thus . . .  
 To stand on Darien's mid-isthmus rocks,  
 And watch the centuried leagues of either sea  
 Tide at the base with time-long constancy,  
 As though a continent opposed their shocks;  
 Unconscious each of other's neighb'ring sea. . . .  
 Each with its distance blue of mystery . . .  
 Divisioned only by a dream of land.



those 'withered dreams' which are flowers dewed with immortality. And, in Everard Meynell's words:

'not his happiness, nor his tenderness, nor his sensibility had been marred, like his constitution, by his experiences. To be the target of such pains as it is the habit of the world to deplore as the extreme of disaster, and yet to keep alive the young flame of his poetry; to be under compulsion to watch the ignominies of the town, and yet never to be nor to think himself ignominious; to establish the certitude of his virtue; to keep flourishing an infinite tenderness and capability for delicacies and *gentilezze* of love—these were the triumphs of his immunity.' <sup>1</sup>

Induced to go to hospital by his rescuers, and there saved from the imminent death which the first doctor consulted had prophesied, Thompson abandons opium and awakens to intellectual activity. He goes to the Premonstratensian Monastery of the Franciscans at Storrington and there, struggling with physical ruin and the clamour of nerves starving for opium, he begins to give his 'dear givers' their own giving. First 'Daisy', and other slight things, then the Shelley essay and, some six months after his arrival at the monastery, about midsummer 1889, 'The Ode to the Setting Sun'. No wonder his grateful love went out to his rescuers. Wilfrid and Alice Meynell, and a friend, when that 'first conclusive

<sup>1</sup> *Life*. London libraries seem to have been a resort as the Manchester libraries had been. The then Librarian of the Guildhall Library, Mr. Bernard Kettle, told an interviewer that he remembered Thompson as a constant visitor to the library. But 'he got into such bad straits and was so poorly clad that it fell to my lot to have to perform the painful duty of asking him to forgo his visits. He always came with two books in his pockets.'

sign' arrived in London, set out for a train journey to Storrington to congratulate the poet. They knew what sort of food a poet needed. Material help alone could never have saved Thompson when he was first persuaded to call at the editorial office of *Merry England*. After one of the early visits to Palace Court he brought away to his lodgings a volume of Alice Meynell's poems. 'At that time' Mr. Wilfrid Meynell has told me, while he looked back past eighteen years of his full and eventful life, 'Thompson had not discovered himself. He did not know for certain that his thoughts were poetical thoughts. He had written a few verses at school, and a few more while on the London streets, but up to that time, when he came to *Merry England*, after five years in London, he still did not know how true a poet he was. When he came to see me he had sent an essay—a good essay—with the verse, and he thought that only the essay deserved attention. And I remember the first occasion on which he came to our house in the evening, I gave him Mrs. Meynell's little volume of *Poems*. He took it away to his lodgings, and when he came back he told us how he had sat up reading it that night, and finally had thrown it down in his excitement, and said aloud: "Then I, too, am a poet!" He found she had said things he wanted to say, and it came to him as a revelation that they were sayable. He treated many of the ideas in her poems in his own, but in his own different manner of course. . . . He was amenable to suggestions and criticisms, but he could hold firmly to his own opinion on occasion. Where one urged, for instance, a greater simplicity of diction, he generally held by what he had written. His poems were simple enough to him,

and he did not always understand one's objections. There was never anything said in print after the publication of his poems, about the difficulties of his language, which had not been put before him strongly by members of our family. In its profusion and ornateness of language his style is in marked contrast to that of Mrs. Meynell and of his friend Coventry Patmore.'

Mr. Meynell's verdict on the time at Owens College was that 'Thompson did nothing except the discursive private reading which gave him such a wide knowledge of literature. But all the time a young man now spends playing games he spent in those mental gymnastics of composition and intensive reading which are so much more important.'

Mr. Meynell agreed that the children of the household were inclined to fight a little shy of their eccentric friend who was writing magnificent poems to them: 'I remember that when she of whom that exquisite thing "The Making of Viola" was written heard the poem, she was indignant with her poet for having, as she firmly believed, been responsible for ordering for her a brown corduroy dress, which she wore and very much disliked. That was when she had heard the poem read aloud, and caught the drift of

Spin, daughter Mary, spin,  
Spin a *tress* for Viola,

and

Spin, Queen Mary, a  
Brown *tress* for Viola!

Thompson's return to London in February 1890 is no break of the creative period; 'Love in Dian's Lap' and 'Sister Songs' and 'The Hound of Heaven'

followed in the next eighteen months. The return to London was due to the need for 'more bookish' surroundings, and perhaps more insistent, his delight in the privilege of sharing days with the Monica, Viola and Sylvia of the poems already stirring in him; and of contact with the personality of their mother, to whom he was more than half a child himself, and who was to him more than half a mother, a human divinity. At the back of his mind there was also the persistent hope of meeting in London streets the girl who had picked him up out of kindness, having that night not attracted one of the more customary sharers of her cab and her lodgings; she who had saved him from starvation and sheltered him out of pitiful love, and who, when she learnt that he had found friends in his own world, vanished from his sight more deeply into hers. The famous passage in 'Sister Songs' explains but hardly expresses the remorse which sent him back again and again to the streets. As for his journalism, so far as the practical side of it was concerned, the amusing accounts by Everard Meynell, Mr. Lewis Hind and Mr. Wilfrid Whitten are complementary parts of a single picture which contains no features that surprise one in view of the poet's previous history. Mr. Hind recalling editorship of the *Academy* from 1896 till 1903,<sup>1</sup> says that the journal's 'star writers' were Francis Thompson, Lionel Johnson and Arnold Bennett. Francis Thompson was a star by virtue solely of his genius; he had to be carefully managed. Arnold Bennett needed no management, but managed himself and the editor as well. In *Naphtali* Mr. Hind tells the well-known story of how Thompson

<sup>1</sup> *Naphtali*.



VIOLA MEYNELL : AS THE POET KNEW HER

was managed, and of how he was persuaded after the long silence of his Muse to write the ode on the death of Cecil Rhodes in 1902. A seemingly unlikely subject, and a seemingly hopeless plan to get an ode from such a poet for periodical publication.

'He brought in the "ode" on press day, hours late; he fumbled in various pockets of his time-worn clothes for the bits of paper on which it was written, thanked me profusely when I gave him half a crown to purchase some dinner, and promised to return at 9 p.m. to read the proof. He arrived at ten, *exalté* with port and laudanum: he read the proof standing and swaying. When he had finished it he said, his enunciation a little blurred, "It's all right, Hind. No Corrections."'

A little earlier, nearer to the period when his productivity was not again withered by taking laudanum, one of the acquaintances of the literary circle of the Meynells was Richard le Gallienne, a young poet and critic who had written the first review of Thompson in the *Daily Chronicle*. He gives us an opportunity of realizing what it meant to Thompson to come in and out of that home. Of Mrs. Meynell he says:

'There was the charm of a beautiful abbess about her, with the added *esprit* of intellectual sophistication. However quietly she sat in her drawing-room of an evening with her family and friends about her, her presence radiated a peculiarly lovely serenity, like a twilight gay with stars. But there was nothing austere or withdrawn about her. . . . In that very lively household of young people . . . she was one with the general fun.'

And

'I saw Francis Thompson one evening there, but I cannot say that he made a great impression upon me. He seemed a rather ineffective personality, sitting silent and shrunken within himself, but it was probably his shy reserve that gave me that impression, and among his familiars, I am told, he was a different being.'<sup>1</sup>

He was, at auspicious moments. Readers of his 'Life' may see that; but to strangers, as for some time after his first acquaintance with them, to the Meynell children, he was apt to seem startling or ludicrous. Mr. Daniel O'Connor has told me of a meeting with Thompson about ten o'clock one evening in 1905 or 1906, loaded with books which he was reading for his Life of St. Ignatius, and looking much more like the most desperate inmate of a work-house than the famous poet who did not sell, and the fairly busy reviewer. Asked where he had come from, the poet assured O'Connor that he had just left the British Museum (shut two hours before), but agreed to eat something. O'Connor, then a young and ambitious literary agent, happened to be chaperoning two young ladies who had just left a theatre where they were members of the cast of a play. Everybody was prepared for supper, in fact. Escorted by O'Connor the party entered a West End restaurant well known to epicures, and at that moment, fairly full of a clientele mainly in evening dress. Thompson was a startling apparition. Something had delayed his passage through the swinging

<sup>1</sup> *The Romantic Nineties*. More urbane than Wilfrid Blunt's picture, quoted below, p. 177.

doors and his friends had reached their table when he came in like a sleep-walking ghost, dazed shining eyes, and scarecrow figure.<sup>1</sup> Asked what he would have for supper, he called out in a loud, penetrating nasal drawl, 'I—want—some—PORRIDGE', and after a little longer pause—'and—some—BEER'. They constituted his staple articles of diet.

Before the end of last century, that is to say before he passed his fortieth year, Thompson's main work and the main significance of events in his life was already over, and Thompson knew it. Opium and alcohol, while they prolonged his battle against tubercular extinction gradually closed up the windows of his intellect, and once more, as when he had not yet acquired an instrument of expression, his searching intuitions subsided into the dark waters of dream. A few more essays, contributed to the *Academy* and the *Athenæum*, and a biography which was a piece of literary journalism by a genius, and a few verse fragments, notes, and two or three poems, including the perfect song to the 'world invisible', and he passed from his tortured struggle with earth into 'a little peace'.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wilfrid Blunt's impression (*Diaries*, Vol. 2) on August 24, 1907, when Wilfrid Meynell and his son Everard motored down to Everard's cottage near Newbuildings with Thompson, who was to stay there for a week:

"The poor poet seemed to be in the last stages of consumption, more like death than anything I have seen. . . . He is emaciated beyond credibility, his poor little figure a mere skeleton, under clothes lent him for the occasion by the Meynells. He has the smallest head and face of any grown man I ever saw, colourless, except for his sharp nose, where all light is concentrated, and his bright eyes. It is the face of a Spanish sixteenth-century Saint, almost that of a dying child."



## CHAPTER II

### THE CRITIC AND PROSE WRITER

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*'Truth is a good dog; but beware of barking too close to the heels of error lest you get your brains knocked out.'*—A. T. COLEMAN.

M VALERY LARBAUD, in praising Patmore's prose, said that it is completely divorced from his poetry; a different art, with different standards and rules of expression. This is perhaps the working of the clear-cut French mind which prefers definiteness to suggestiveness in criticism. The verse and prose of Patmore make a pair of children from the same stock even if they could not be described as twins. There is almost as distinct a contrast between Patmore's prose and Thompson's, as there is between the work in verse of the two poets. It would be strange if a creative mind freely using both media, could prevent its electric vitality sparking light from one to the other. No intensely poetic mind produces prose into which poetry does not sometimes flow. The prose need not then be inartistic, when it is touched by the breath and finer spirit of knowledge. Although the controlled and economical art of Patmore's prose may be seen invading his verse rather than the poetry in the verse overflowing into the prose, the proposition just formulated is proved by the frequently high imaginative power of the prose by Shelley and Thompson. Such vibrating imagery and expressive music indicate a certain poetic spontaneity and metaphorical wealth of thought. By the subservience of intellect to intuitive feeling their prose becomes largely a more explicit statement of the wisdom in their poetry. It is a

service in which Shelley's prose is a more artistic medium than Thompson's, which cannot be said to have a great relative importance in his work because it is rarely better than a completely spontaneous expression of opinions, sometimes not very valuable opinions, or a sketch of some idea which is more completely expressed in his verse. It is always easy to read; it has the merit of clarity, is admirably flexible, and sometimes rich with sound and colour. But there is no sustained quality of art in either of the two prose books, the 'Life of Saint John Baptist de la Salle', or that of St. Ignatius, which are long enough to show the inequality of style. The best pieces of prose writing are the essays on 'Health and Holiness', and 'Nature's Immortality', in which the poet unfolds important aspects of his thought. There the thought and the form move together and evolve symmetrically. The subject is inexhaustible. The more famous Shelley essay is an attempt, which failed, to make several purple passages join up in a continuously vivid strain. It is strained because the writer is not quite sure of what he most wants to say. Thompson's genius inevitably produced the purple passage in prose because his imagination, once awakened by a theme, would flare up beyond the limits of purely intellectual control. At such moments not only the imagery resembles his poetry, but there is heard a verbal music which is rare in his prose, and is often absent from the verse. It is not heard in the prose when Thompson is waving a banner; the forceful prose of 'In Darkest England' is often finely rhythmical, but at its most forceful and rhythmical it lacks the fineness of art:

'But long and crying suffering waited redress, we

what it symbolizes is ours. The sectaries came in the night, as we lay asleep, and stole it from us. Many of our garments have they masked in; never in one more distinctively our own than this. Red in all its grades—from the scarlet of the Sacred College to that imperial colour we call purple, the tinge of clotted blood, which we have fitly made the symbol of the dead Christ—it is ours. Hue of the Princes of the Church; hue of Martyrs; hue of sway, and love, and Passion-tide; ours by divinest heritage; vesture in which the Proto-Martyr of Freedom hung upon Calvary. To that garb of liberty a Cardinal is proudly lineal; a Prince of the Blood indeed!

It is in the romantic, chivalrous strain of those two ecclesiastical Ballads of which his editor remarks: "The Veteran of Heaven"—in some sense a divine parody of Macaulay's "On the Battle of Naseby"; and a prophetic apostrophe of the Church under the title of "The Lily of the King". The romantic militarism is Spanish, as we shall see.

When his imagination is stirred, ever so mechanically, his prose style immediately becomes individual, though, as above, the manner may be rhetorical. Thompson had very clearly defined ideas about the world around him, and the reader of that little book on the saintly educationist of Sales is bound to recognize that it comes from an alert intelligence which can focus fundamental scientific principles upon social problems. The frequent presence of a controversial element in the poet's prose provides a partial explanation of the intellectual breadth in his poetry. Once rescued from the worst stage of his opium habit he resumed what must have been a keenly positive

intellectual activity before he came to London, not merely a passive absorption of food for dreams. That was provided by his earliest reading, and given an application by his heart's dread theology. In what we may call his Christian apologetics, he is an agile manipulator of logic and of the nuances of statement by which he contrives to attack the backsliders in his own camp while seeming only to be challenging the enemy. This crusading spirit of Thompson is apt to interfere with his judgment when he comes to the disinterested criticism of literature. That should have been shown in the examination of his views on Shelley. But it is quite clear in another essay, which does not appear in his works.<sup>1</sup> He has not even the sympathy with Bunyan which the poet in him has for Shelley, and so, by a misdirected zeal he sets about the great tinker for all he is worth. 'Bunyan in the Light of Modern Criticism' is the promising title under which Thompson displays his least critical attitude to a writer who, whatever contrasts his style presented with Thompson's, had obvious claims on his respect. All that can be said in Thompson's defence, apart from his feeling that he was taking part in a Catholic crusade, is that this title is only the heading, after all, to an ephemeral review of a contemporary book of essays, only one of which is concerned with Bunyan. Once more the most interesting passages are asides, secondary thoughts called up by the theme, here of scientific exactness in 'Higher Criticism'. He is at the beginning turned to a speculation on the possibility 'of reducing literary criticism, above all poetical criticism, to an exact science'. This subject, rather

<sup>1</sup> See *Merry England*, November 1888, Vol. XII.

than Bunyan, provides the best reading in his article.

'There are subtle currents of perception which the most delicate galvanometer of expression refuses to indicate. You cannot always formulate feeling. There are cases in which, if the critic attempt to fortify his inborn instinct for poetic excellence by reasoned demonstration, he deludes his readers, and most of all himself.'

It is an instance of the homogeneity of Thompson's thought. Just as the essay 'In Darkest England' is extended at certain suggestive points in both the de la Salle and Ignatius studies, the distinction between what can be said scientifically and what can only be suggested emotively is latent in all his best critical essays, notably in those on Shelley, Coleridge, and Milton. For instance: 'The style of Coleridge is bare of manner, without feature, not "distinguishable" in member, joint, and limb; it is, in the Roman sense of *merum*, mere style; style unalloyed and integral. Imitation has no foothold; it would tread on glass.' In the Bunyan essay he continues his argument that lately the Higher Criticism

'was a thing so overwhelming that the few cavillers who were sensible of these things dared not lift their voices. But since the very prophet of the new method, Mr. Matthew Arnold, showed by his onslaught on Shelley that all the forces of the Higher Criticism were unavailing to protect a critic from aberrations of judgment grievous as any recorded of poor, despised Jeffrey, nay even (except for Gifford's vulgarity) of Gifford himself, it has become possible for

a writer, while acknowledging the genuine good work done by the innovation, to question its claims to the rank of a science. Nay, we ask pardon for using such language: to our thinking, criticism, in essence if not in detail, is a higher and more delicate thing than any science.'

He therefore extends his welcome to Mr. Dowling, the writer of *Ignorant Essays*, the book he is reviewing, because with sympathetic intuition he 'speaks of the great poets, of Keats, or Spenser, or De Quincey, as we are told that Keats himself spoke'. In a footnote at this point, Thompson says: 'We make no apology for placing De Quincey among the poets. If ever poetry quitted for a space her mighty orchestra of metre to draw hardly less mighty harmonies from the majestic organ of prose, it was when she dominated the great soul in the frail body of De Quincey.' We may more than suspect that the critic's intense admiration of De Quincey, which is voiced elsewhere, as in a lesser degree his admiration of Coleridge, is assisted by the not altogether factitious association of their opium habits. It is necessary to keep in mind that no artist was ever more self-conscious, no artist ever had a more profound and detailed knowledge of himself and his own possibilities than Thompson. The effect of opium on other writers would be to him a means to self-knowledge. In such an unexpected context as the essay on Milton the subject is introduced in connection with sublimity. He recalls that De Quincey described how in opium dreams the sense of space was portentously enlarged. In *Paradise Lost* he finds 'such a tyrannous extension of the spatial sense'.

Thompson proceeds from Mr. Dowling's 'quick, direct insight' to the following not very happy proof of it:

'How any man with imagination can bear the book (i.e. *The Pilgrim's Progress*) I do not know. Bunyan had inexhaustible invention, but no imagination. He saw a reason for things, but not the things themselves. No creation of the imagination can lack consequence or verisimilitude. On almost every page of the "Progress" there is violation of sequence, outrage against verisimilitude. Christian has a great burden on his back and is in rags. He cannot remove the burden. (Why?) He is put to bed (with the burden on his back) then he is troubled in his mind (the burden is forgotten, and the vision altered completely and fatally) . . .'

Thompson quotes a great deal more of this puerile stupidity with immense satisfaction and approval, although as he quotes it grows if possible sillier, and concludes 'It is a horrible attempt to tinkerize the Bible'.

The amazing thing, since Thompson's theme a moment earlier was the futility of logic-bound criticism, is that he can not only quote this without perceiving its wrong-headedness, but he must comment in this way upon it:

'Surely this is true; and it is a blot on English criticism that we should have had to wait so long for a strong, honest voice to utter it. Macaulay praised the vivid impression produced by the scenes. Macaulay was brought up in Evangelical circles, and we suspect that early familiarity had much to do with the effect produced by these scenes on his imagination.'

One is provoked to retort: 'We suspect that Thompson had not read the "Progress" until his critical mind, already devoted to the idea of taking a knightly part in the Roman Catholic crusade of his time, could inhibit his poetic sympathies in such a direction.' No imaginative reader, especially in youth, can fail to experience the vividness of that dream-like allegory. It is quite as vivid as *Robinson Crusoe*, and more subtly true. Thompson's suspicion of Macaulay's experience is evidence that he had abandoned criticism for crusading. But he is absurd rather than malignant; malignancy was impossible to him. The sight of him as he proceeds to wade into the Slough of Despond could not awake in an admirer of Bunyan any unkindness of feeling for him. The ineptitudes shower upon the reader's astonished mind:

'For all that distinguishes this slough from any other slough, it might be the quagmire on the common into which Farmer Giles's cow strayed the other day . . .'

'He is as incapable of Beauty as of terror . . .'

'He speaks of an Enchanted Arbour. . . . It is nothing but a rustic alehouse bench, upholstered with cushions, by a daring flight of Bunyanesque fancy: very comfortable to sleep on, as the allegorist assures us . . .'

' . . . consider the castle of Giant Despair. Despair himself is a gross, dull, blundering creation, very much like a ruffianly inn-keeper with irresponsible powers. . . .'

And so on, with nearly every sentence containing an unconscious tribute to the triumph of Bunyan's imagination over prosaic material. And so our critic



concludes his praise of the book he in reviewing by saying: 'We are not grateful to the essayist for having induced us to review our acquaintance with the *Pilgrim's Progress*.' 'Review our acquaintance' is very good!

But Thompson critical rather than Thompson crusading is one of the best of journalists. He is always entertaining, sometimes rarely discriminating and bold in thought, as in the essay on Milton, which is not only an interesting comparison of Shakespeare and Milton but an excellent review of Coventry Patmore's criticism. He can be dignified and courteous too. 'Sir Leslie Stephen as a Biographer' is a model of urbanity and strict justice. He begins by referring gracefully to Stephen's books on Pope, Swift, Johnson, and his editing, especially of the Dictionary of National Biography, the contributors to which 'wrote as they have written because Mr. Stephen set them the model. And the model was his own.'

In the *Studies of a Biographer* he finds the model. The title seems 'almost to disclaim' the name of essayist for the author, yet there are things which 'justify that name'. He decides that the essay '(properly so called, and exercising the widest latitude in the interpretation of the term) is not Mr. Stephen's province. Yet it is impossible to refuse him respect in it.' The escape from this blind alley is characteristic: 'The essay is not his province by birthright; yet he makes it his by force of arms.' But in the next passage the very acme of tact with honesty is attained:

'In the essay on Matthew Arnold (delivered as a lecture before the Owens College, but really an essay) he modestly sets himself down a Philistine.

"Humility is truth," said St. Bernard. Humility here is truth. Mr. Leslie Stephen, from the standpoint of Matthew Arnold, is a Philistine. That reminds us how the word has shifted its meanings since the days of Arnold. It has come to mean a man who cares nothing for literature. Nay, its uttermost degradation has been reached by a writer in the daily Press, a writer belonging to the class of "young barbarians" whom Arnold contemned, and who has used it to designate those that do not dress according to highly tailored canons. After this, the spiritual children of Arnold have nothing left but to abandon the word, as cast-off clothing, to the valets of language. Arnold intended it for those—inside or outside literature—who were natively prosaic and unimaginative. Now to these Mr. Stephen belongs. One is loath to endorse his self-claim of that ugly word "Philistine". One is loath to abandon him to the enemy—he does too much honour to them. He is a literary Panther:

So poised, so gently he descends from high,  
It seems a soft dismissal from the sky. . .

Yet throughout his writing one cannot but be conscious of a certain hardness, a lack of moist light. He appreciates poetry—particularly the poetry of men such as Wordsworth and Arnold. But his appreciation is intellectual. Poetry, or the appreciation of poetry, requires in its fullness both intellect and emotion. Nevertheless one may have it without intellect, but not without emotion. Mr. Stephen does seem in a certain way to reach an intellectual appreciation even of the æsthetic side in poetry. If he does not reach it directly, he seems, by a certain

strenuous fairness of mind, to reach it in a reflex way, through considering and appreciating its æsthetic effect on others. In the same manner he succeeds in forming an intellectual image of much else, in diverse directions, which has no personal appeal to him. So he becomes the most cultivated of non-æsthetic writers; of all Philistines, the one whom those of the opposite camp can read with pleasure or placidity.'

Could the judgment be more just, or the terms it is couched in more tactful? The full flavour, the piquant sauce, in this will only be relished by the reader who knows not only what Thompson said about the Higher Criticism and Matthew Arnold as its high priest, but that curious essay on Shelley in Stephen's *Hours in a Library*, which is much more respectful to Shelley than Arnold, and yet is clearly the failure of a 'non-æsthetic writer' to apprehend or express the living truth in Shelley. But the æsthetic appreciation of Shelley was carried by Thompson himself to the extreme limits of expression in prose. Unfortunately Thompson rarely used his creative gift in criticism. His prose is generally written for sale; it is his workman's tool with which he attempts to take a workman's place in the world's daily life. He wrote most of his essays as articles, and their excellencies are usually accidental and incidental. They reveal the ability of a clever and well-informed mind rather than of a genius. The genius is in an occasional purple patch, not in the artistic symmetry and power of a great prose writer. Very often the writer is content with paraphrasing accepted opinions instead of using his penetrating

æsthetic sense to make discoveries. The opening sentences on 'Bacon':

'First and before all things, Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, was a great philosopher. In saying this we make no pretension to estimate the value of his philosophy regarded as an exposition of truth. But it is the acknowledged fact that he is the founder, the *fons et origo*, of that utilitarian school of philosophy which is peculiarly English.'

Are not these sentences a succession of absurdities? How can a critic declare that 'first and before all things' Bacon was a great philosopher without claiming that his philosophy contained valuable truth? And the confusion of 'the utilitarian school' with the scientific method of induction shows that Thompson is not thinking. Moreover Bacon, so far as he was a philosopher, has only a factitious connection with utilitarianism. To an æsthetic critic, as he was to Shelley, Bacon is first and before all things an artist in prose, a writer of genius. There is an appreciation of Bacon's prose later in the essay, but a very imperfect one, for any verdict which says that 'he survives chiefly by his Essays' without finding more than one exception to 'the succession of short barks' in his prose is very ill-founded. And yet in spite of this misdirection of attention the critic is actually reminded of Sir Thomas Browne.

The deliberate sonority of *Moestitiæ Encomium* and *Finis Coronat Opus* has been noted in later chapters. A finer example of poetic prose is to be found in 'Nature's Immortality'. He has a subject which is part of the substance of his poetry. He is so thoroughly in his own vein that he translates the open-

ing passage into verse, but the prose is better poetry than the verses quoted as a footnote by his editor. But it is rhetorical poetry; which is not to be despised. In conception the whole essay is a rhetorical poem, or a rhapsody, richer in content than Goethe's rhapsody on Nature from which some passages are quoted later. Like Goethe he says that Nature has no heart, but he carries his argument beyond this *dictum de dicto* into the mystical belief that even the 'mighty aerial *valerium*' overhead is not so high and deep and wide as the heart of little Man. 'Life's a veil the real has' is one of his additions to a translation of Victor Hugo. So Nature is God's daughter; her heart is God's. Beauty is 'beauty for eternity'. 'If the Trinity were not revealed' he would suspect its existence by the trinities through which the spirit of man expounds itself. The trinity of beauty is such—Poetry, Art, Music. He calls it the trinity of beauty 'because it is the property of earthly as of the heavenly beauty to create everything to its own image and likeness. Painting is the eye of passion; Poetry is the voice of passion; Music is the throbbing of her heart. For all beauty is passionate though it may be a passionless passion.' He proceeds to examine Art, since they all three are distinct manifestations of a single essence, and Art is the most easily understood because most objective in result. There follows a suggestive analysis of 'mental image' and 'objective image', which is another revelation of Thompson's intellectual alertness. In a footnote he insists that he is merely weaving a suggestive allegory of ideas to show how Nature is a phase of the Supreme Spirit, and that his words are not to be read as a metaphysical explanation. He is thinking poetically,

using the materials of the intellect as in his finest verse, to weave the garment of God. It was a scientist, Sir Oliver Lodge, who used this phrase in an address to the British Association to express the ultimate function of science, and it is noteworthy that Sir Oliver Lodge has also appreciated the just reflections of scientific theories of matter and energy in Thompson's odes. To the poet science is making the 'single essence' 'more objective'. This is the central principle in his attitude to the external universe. Dante, Donne and Shelley meet him here on common ground. It is high ground; it is Lucretius' Mountain.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ARTIST

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*'I stand and gaze  
On those bright steps that heavenward raise  
Their practicable way.'*—WORDSWORTH.

*'... the breath and finer spirit of knowledge.'*—SHELLEY.

**C**RITICISM in some of its finest representatives greeted the poetry of Thompson with an instant acclamation. Faults were found, but the appearance of that always astonishing phenomenon, a great poet, was recognized by the elect. The more benighted judgments passed upon such disturbing work may be left now to the peace of oblivion. Thompson himself as a critic was not infallible, though he showed a disposition to be generous where the work of contemporaries was in question. The contents of *Poems*, *Sister Songs*, and *New Poems* were, it must be confessed, full of provocation to conservative critics, but they were not less charged with evidence of original genius to any reader with æsthetic sensibility.

Imperfections are as plentiful in Thompson's work as they have been in the work of most great poets, and so were the 'influences'. Both are more easily found in the early work, though one would hesitate to say that the finest achievements before *New Poems* were inferior to any of the later ones, excepting possibly 'The Mistress of Vision' and 'The Anthem of Earth', two astounding poems to come from the same mind within a few years,—as if Coleridge after writing 'Christabel' had produced the 'Ode to the West Wind'—supreme magic and supreme rhetoric

in passionate poetry. This distinction, which must not be pushed to the roots, enables a reader of Thompson to make a rough division of his achievement in verse. His peculiar greatness—I think we shall discover—is in ‘the double potency’ of intellectual and emotional energy. It is a Shakespearean poise of power which would have become Keats’s. The majority of great poets use poetic craft to express a wealth of beauty in a subjective lyricism which is content to ignore the universe built up by the human reason; facts are reflected in their immortal clarities of magic evocation only when these intruders merge without effort into the phantastic harmony. A few great poets, like Milton and Mr. Charles Doughty, incorporate intellectual energy into their most ambitious creations past the degree of equipose during which alone phantasy can absorb facts into an organic vision or facts support and not break through phantasy. The poet may incorporate intellectual energy in poetry through scholarship or through science, appropriating historical and artistic elements of the past deliberately (instead of merely passively, through tradition) or trying to display the spiritual significance of scientific discoveries. Whatever the ultimate place of Thompson may be when posterity begins to compare his absolute stature with the greatest English poets, his uncommon balance of emotive and intellectual power is already appreciable. Intellect, it must be remembered, is not confined to the operations of orthodox science and philosophy; it is, as the following chapters ought to demonstrate, at work to transcend its own particular function in both poetry and religion. The mystical structure of Thompson’s work implies the activity of his intellect as clearly as does the



appropriation or anticipation of scientific discoveries. That mystics all bear witness to very similar experience does not mean that they cannot be original thinkers, any more than the likeness of a poet's vision to another's implies that the vision is an imitation. As Thompson recognized, the finest and surest traces of genius in a work of art can hardly be expressed or explained in other terms than its own; the ultimate realities are felt rather than reasoned.

A survey of a poet's work is most useful then as a series of finger-posts, with an occasional sweep of the arm to surrounding horizons so that we know where we are. The task of criticism is comparatively humble, but difficult because it must go slightly in advance of rational proof. Landmarks of fact are as water in the desert. A few more facts then.

Thompson's verse was originally published in three volumes: *Poems* in 1893, *Sister Songs* in 1895, and *New Poems* in 1897. A few early poems of importance, such as the 'Ode to the Setting Sun', written in 1889, appeared in volume form for the first time in *New Poems*. In the definitive edition of 1913 a rearrangement was effected by the editor, Mr. Wilfrid Meynell, which caused a new grouping of the miscellaneous poems in closer accord with dates of composition, so that the earlier poems appear in the first volume of the collected *Works*, and roughly correspond to the first half of Thompson's poetic career, which begins modestly, back in the '70's at Ushaw, crystallizes into print with the publication of 'The Passion of Mary' in *Merry England*, April 1888, and may be said to conclude with *Sister Songs*, and 'The Hound of Heaven'. The poet's earliest appearance in a book was in 1892, when Mr. Meynell included

'Daisy', 'A Song of Youth and Age' and 'To my God-child' in his anthology, *The Child Set in the Midst, by Modern Poets*.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton has written that the Victorian English thought Patmore ('the Catholic Browning') 'an indecent sentimentalist, as they did all the hot and humble religious diarists of Italy and Spain. . . . None of them were able even to understand Francis Thompson; his sky-scraping humility, his mountains of mystical detail, his occasional and unashamed weakness, his sudden and sacred blasphemies. Perhaps the shortest definition of the Victorian Age is that he stood outside it.'

It is unnecessary here to show that Patmore has no sympathetic relation with mystics like St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, or St. Catherine of Genoa; but one may recall three of Thompson's Odes, 'For the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, 1897', 'The Nineteenth Century', and 'Cecil Rhodes', to prove with facts that Mr. Chesterton's vivid generalizations conclude rather beyond the mark. Moreover poets who were also personal influences over Thompson, Alice Meynell and Coventry Patmore, were certainly not outside their age, though with the privilege of genius they were in some respects ahead of it. The crusading Catholic spirit as well as the high hopes raised by political and scientific achievements of the century, is also an element in the Victorian age, and is also observable in Thompson's work. When he was entering upon his teens the Tractarians had provoked the first of a series of violent attacks upon their policy of reviewing the confessional. This was only a part of the wider campaigns for and against Ritualism

which are still disturbing the ecclesiastical world. Such atmospheric disturbance could not have been ignored by a poet whose parents were both Roman Catholic Converts at a time when the Catholic revival which had started at Oxford was moving in waves over the whole country; it could not have left uninfluenced the poet whose first and most crushing failure, in his own and his friends' eyes, was the failure in his ambition to become a Roman Catholic priest. And his official biographer has given us material and hints for the assumption that although not in any sense a conventional churchman, Thompson was deeply impressed by the artistic ritual and symbolism of the Church, which during his schooldays at Ushaw was continually being displayed to his eyes. The remainder of the personal background to his poetry is felt in the story of his family relations, his tuberculous constitution, glimpses of medical science, his black days and increasing laudanum doses in London, his passionate reading, and his dramatic emergence from the nether world into an air of beauty, culture, intellectual adventure, and childish companionship. No poet's work ever had closer contact with the social or personal events of his life.

The earliest verse, written at school and college; shows that his reading in English poetry had made him especially familiar with Chatterton, Coleridge, Tennyson, and Shelley. Shakespeare was deeply impressed on his mind from his earliest youth, though naturally his work required its maturity of power to indicate a Shakespearean influence. Of this earliest adventuring into literature in his father's or it may be his mother's book cupboard, he was able to recall that he 'profoundly experienced the atmospheric effect of

*Macbeth*, *Lear*, *The Tempest*, *Coriolanus*; of all the plays in various degree'. He 'experienced profoundly that sense of trance, of dream-like dimness' in the fairy poetry of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

'Dream-Tryst', perhaps the earliest of the poems included in the *Works*, is clearly a mixture of Shelley and Poe (first stanza), Coleridge and Shelley (second stanza), Blake (the Blake of *Poetical Sketches*) and Poe (third stanza). This is not to deny the presence of an original element belonging to himself, in an opium-encouraged mood to which we know that he would have been liable at the period of the composition. Some of the College verses quoted by his biographer suggest more than the influence of Shelley. The line:

And his locks were tangled with the golden tresses of the Sun.

does not only carry us forward to his mature Shelleyism:

Tangle the tresses of a phantom wind;

it takes us back to George Peele, an insufficiently explored mine known to many modern poets. Peele (*David and Bethsabe*) wrote:

His thunder is entangled in my hair.

Thompson probably discovered Lamb's *English Dramatic Poets* quite early.

Except in the best work in Volume I the poet is constantly imitating; sometimes with a success which justifies him, but at moments with unfortunate results. The title of one of the 'Miscellaneous Poems', 'Song of the Hours', suggests the possible source of inspiration, but when we read it we find not only a poor imitation of Shelley but an imitation still more unfortunate though, because easier, truer to the original, of the Swinburne who was a parody of him-

self. At moments Shelley and Swinburne seem to be running in harness, rather breathlessly:

We see the wind, like a light swift leopard  
 Leap on the flocks of the cloud that flee,  
 As we follow the feet of the radiant shepherd  
 Whose bright sheep drink of the sea.  
 When that drunken Titan the Thunder  
 Stumbles through staggered Heaven,  
 And spills on the scorched earth under  
 The fiery wine of the levin,  
 With our mystic measure of rhythmic motion  
 We charm him in snorting sleep,  
 While round him the sun enchants from ocean  
 The walls of a cloudy keep. . . .

But if Shelley and Swinburne run in harness, they don't pull together. This passage is not the worst in the 'Song of the Hours'.

The best of the miscellaneous pieces in Volume I are much more artistic than this, and generally later in date, for it is to be remembered that the verse before *New Poems* includes the first harvest of his poetic maturity. Anticipating that *New Poems* would be above the head of the public, Thompson included, so he said, a number of the lightest things he had written. But there is all the difference between clumsy pastiche and accomplished poetry between the least valuable poems in Volume I and the 'light' poems (such as 'Field-Flower', 'A May Burden', 'To a Snowflake', 'July Fugitive') in Volume II. Here again caution is necessary in discriminating between mature and immature. 'At Lord's' is quite mature in art, and other pieces in the first division, like 'Past Thinking of Solomon', 'Orison-Tryst', 'The Sere of the Leaf', 'A Judgment in Heaven', 'A Fallen Yew', are mature in the sense that they express the poet's individual

vision and contain characteristic imagery, though they fall short of his most accomplished artistry. Whenever Thompson is not at his best, the traces of incompletely absorbed influences are seen. 'The Sere of the Leaf', written to Katherine Tynan, contains images unconvincingly used which he found in Irish Celtic literature, but the employment of rhyme and metre reveals the master hand. 'A Fallen Yew', which is one of the best of the second-best poems, has three reminders of Rossetti in the three lines of the penultimate stanza:

Yea, in that ultimate heart's occult abode  
 To lie as in an oubliette of God  
 Or in a bower untrod.

But the lines must be separated, otherwise the strong current of the idea unifies them into Thompsonian poetry. It is a sign that Thompson's mind was steeped in the work of other poets, including contemporaries, and that his creative originality could overcome the strongest literary associations. That the sensuous warmth and rich colour of Rossetti's Italianate imagination should have found a welcome in the soul of the younger poet was inevitable: in Rossetti was a far reflection of a sky in which Dante shone over one horizon and the troubadours glowed low along the other. If one wanted to find traces of or resemblances to Rossetti and glanced over the 'Contents' of the Works, 'Love in Dian's Lap' would present itself as a likely place to look, knowing already that the title should have Beatrice or Mary instead of Dian. *Scala Jacobi Portaque Eburnea* is lit by the eyes of William Morris's *Beata mea Domina* and the

vision of Rossetti's 'Blessed Damosel'. Thompson's 'Her Portrait' uses a rhetorical device as well as similar diction found in several sonnets of 'The House of Life'. This is pure Rossetti:

What of her silence, that outsweetens speech?  
 What of her thoughts, high marks for mine own thoughts to reach?  
 But the momentary reflection is lost in the unity of the new poem. The same is true of

And then my hand  
 Presses thy letters in my pulses shook;  
 Where, neighboured on my heart with those pure lines  
 In amity of kindred pureness, lies  
 Image of Her conceived Immaculate . . .<sup>1</sup>

Most unexpected echoes, all relatively unimportant as part of Thompson's poetry, may be met with. Even Emerson ('Experience'):

The poet is not lord  
 Of the next syllable may come  
 With the returning pendulum;  
 And what he plans to-day in song,  
 To-morrow sings it in another tongue.<sup>2</sup>

And Browning:

You have loved me, Fair, three lives—or days . . .<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \* \*

What profit if the sun  
 Put forth his radiant thews,  
 And on his circuit run,  
 Even after my device, to this or to that use . . .<sup>4</sup>

Meredith:

Ay, Mother! Mother!  
 What is this Man, thy darling kissed and cuffed,  
 Thou lustingly engender'st. . .<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Orison-Tryst'.

<sup>2</sup> *Sister Songs*.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Poppy'.

<sup>4</sup> 'Retrospect', Vol. II.

<sup>5</sup> 'An Anthem of Earth', Vol. II.

Tennyson:

Over the bickering gonfalons, far-ranged as for Tartarean wars,  
Went a waver of ribbed fire. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Kipling:

But her lover of the South, with a moan upon his mouth,  
Caught her spirit to his arms as it went:  
Then the storms of West and North  
Sent a gusty vaward forth,  
Sent a skirring desolation, and he went.<sup>2</sup>

This sort of thing is an entertaining pastime, more interesting perhaps than cross-word puzzles but not, in the case of Thompson, much more useful in appreciating the poetry. The only deeply significant 'influences' in Thompson's verse are Shelley and Crashaw and Shakespeare and Donne. They are considered in later chapters. Donne is the only one of these influences which cannot be said to have caused some undeniable similarities in the imagery and verbal texture. His influence is powerful but more remote. 'Influence' in any case is too narrow a term for the congenial discoveries of a poet's genius. Of these important influences, Shelley's is the only one which at times becomes anything like an imitation:

A bubble, charioteered by the inward breath,  
Which, ardent for its own invisible lure,  
Urges me glittering to aerial death,  
I am rapt towards that bodiless paramour;  
Blindly the uncomprehended tyranny  
Obeying of my heart's impetuous might.<sup>3</sup>

But it is sufficient to quote such an example to supply the ground for asserting that Thompson does not

<sup>1</sup> 'A Judgment in Heaven'.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Sere of the Leaf'.

<sup>3</sup> *Sister Songs*.



weaken his own original expression. The influences that count in his work are rooted in his own genius, and that is powerful enough to prevent such subterranean sympathies undermining his proud citadel of song. His peculiar artistic faults are varied, and they ought to be recognized. They are faults, as he recognized, of excess, rather than of lack, but they involve in their injury to the form a weakening of power and a marring of beauty. Power consumes itself if it is not given the perfect expression in art.

Thompson's diction is generally a mighty instrument in his hands; it is extensive in vocabulary, adventurously creative, and dealt the hardest blow given by any man's poetry to the 'precious' tendencies of style in the late nineteenth century. Alice Meynell, one of the greatest literary artists of that period, perhaps because of her fine craftsmanship, is a clear indication that refinement of diction was on the verge of poetic anæmia. It is now fairly well established, though some crass remarks were made by contemporary reviewers of Thompson about his murder of the language, that the great majority of his most unusual words were not neologisms; many were not even archaisms, while the archaisms had the warranty of earlier poetic employment, especially by the Elizabethans. A few noticeable peculiarities like 'maniple', 'monstrance', 'stole', were ecclesiastical terms familiar enough to a theological student and necessary extensions of his vocabulary when he was using ecclesiastical symbolism for mystical conceptions. A considerable proportion, at least half, of the peculiarities of his diction serve his constant need to create definite imagery for filmy translucencies of thought.

In Shelley he found many of these, or models for them; and what he did not find in Shelley or in Elizabethan and seventeenth century poets to satisfy his feeling for suggestive phrases he himself devised, either by changing the customary function of a word (e.g. 'radiate surge of colour') or coining one (e.g. 'supportlessly congest'). But most of his neologisms are mild and useful innovations; the strangest words are nearly all in Shakespeare, who, by the way, used nearly as big a proportion of Latinisms as Thompson. No defence of Thompson's Latinisms could have been more effective than one coming from Alice Meynell, and she wrote: <sup>1</sup>

'Obviously there are Latinisms and Latinisms! Those of Gibbon and Johnson, and of their time generally, serve to hold passion well at arm's length; they are the mediate and not the immediate utterance of human feeling. But in F. T. the majestic Latin word is forged hot on the anvil of the artificer. No Old English in the making could be readier or closer.'

This is as complete as a defence could be, so that the fortunate poet can afford to stand at the bar while we try to distinguish between the creative and the unnecessary singularities of his diction. In *New Poems* the more mature artist is much less revolutionary in his regard for words. Making a long list of peculiar words as I read through the verse from the beginning of Volume I to the end of Volume II,<sup>2</sup> I found the

<sup>1</sup> In the *Nation*, November 23, 1907, quoted in the 'Life'.

<sup>2</sup> I was intent on compiling a concordance, until I noticed the somewhat cryptic reference in the 'Life' to the concordance of a 'Mr. Beacock'; which I have failed to trace in any library or catalogue.

numerical proportion of the words noted in the first volume to those noted in the second was as 5 : 2, while nearly all the words most difficult to justify among these unusual or unusually employed words were in the first volume, beginning with 'The Making of Viola', where we have the welcome 'roseal hoverings', and 'sweetling sailed'; but the very unwelcome 'Native in your Heaven is *smile*', which reappears in 'After Her Going':

Blinded herself with *smile*.

There is no artistic justification for peculiarities which are not æsthetically expressive; when they not only fail to strengthen but seriously injure the style as several others do (e.g. 'Still lucencies and *cools* of sleep' in *Sister Songs*) the poet's masterly originality descends to mannerism. But the search for peculiarities of diction, like the search for 'influences', leads to admiration for his triumphant power. It is safe to say that no English poet since Wordsworth has a more influential and energy-releasing effect on poetic diction. This was due to no revolutionary theory but to an ardent study of poets who might develop his power to express new subtleties and splendours of perception in a newly romantic magnificence of metaphor. The rich complexities of his imagination compelled a magnificence of style. He needs not only powerful phraseology for his plunging ideas (e.g. 'immense profound'; 'imperishing essences'; 'vistaed hopes'; 'viols' lissom bowings'; 'fluctuous oared their flexile way'; 'gracile curls of light'; 'beamy-textured'); he needs also the metaphor stuffed with enfolded suggestions:

For lo, into her house  
Spring is come home with her world-wandering feet . . . <sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

This morning saw I, fled the shower,  
The earth reclining in a lull of power.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Her tears made dulcet fretting,  
Her voice had no word,  
More than thunder or the bird.<sup>3</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Night; and the street a corpse beneath the moon,  
Upon the threshold of the jubilant day. . . <sup>4</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

. . . wide o'er rout trampled night  
Flew spurned the pebbled stars . . . <sup>5</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

. . . As night-season phosphoric bars  
Like a flame-plumed fan shake slowly out their ridgy reach of crumbling  
stars.<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Before the living throne of Whom  
The Lights of Heaven burning pray.<sup>7</sup>

His happy exactitudes in the placing of words, as in that unforgettable 'pray' (does it not call up a semi-circle of steady lamp flames in the trepidant stillness?) are not fortunate accidents but the ripe fruit of a trained gift used painstakingly. Examining the manuscript versions of the 'Orient Ode', of which he remarks on one of them that it 'will not be understood for fifty years yet', I noted the patient approach to its seemingly careless power. Here are a few

<sup>1</sup> 'From the Night of Forebeing: an Ode After Easter', Vol. II.

<sup>2</sup> 'Contemplation', Vol. II.

<sup>3</sup> 'Mistress of Vision', Vol. II.

<sup>4</sup> 'Diamond Jubilee', Ode, Vol. II.

<sup>5</sup> 'Ode to the Setting Sun', Vol. I.

<sup>6</sup> 'A Judgment in Heaven', Vol. I.

<sup>7</sup> 'The Passion of Mary', Vol. I.

typical alterations. Each altered line is repeated below to show the effect of the successive deletions and changes. (Others appear in Appendix IV.)

- (1) The *minatory* approaches of thy face.  
The *puissant* approaches of thy face.
- (2) *Sped* with terror, leashed with longing.  
*Pricked* with terror, leashed with longing.
- (3) Commingling alien *and yet kindred* breath.  
Commingling alien *yet affined* breath.
- (4) With double *potence* of the black and white.  
With double *regence* of the black and white.  
With double *potence* of the black and white.
- (5) In thy twofold *potence* meet.  
In thy twofold *puissance* meet.  
In thy twofold *regence* meet.  
In thy twofold *sceptre* meet.
- (6) Out of the terror of thy might,  
Out of thy *minatory* might.
- (7) With nimbler meanings brimmèd up.  
Brimmèd with nimbler meanings up.

Such shiftings and polishings were, it must be remembered, in the carefully-written manuscripts, intended for the printers and revised at the last moment. The close attention was intellectual as well as æsthetic. On the sheet containing the phrase 'Night's sciential idolatry' he puts an asterisk to the phrase, referring to the following footnote:

'For once I have used a symbol which—unlike true symbolism—will not turn every way. The parallel is incomplete, for the moon is *dead*—"the corpse in Night's highway" as Mr. Patmore says. Otherwise the parallel is accurate, your science may grasp at it. Yet even science has lately discovered (what poets never

There was never moon,  
Save the white sufficing Roman:  
Light most heavenly-human—  
~~Light~~ the unseen form of sound,  
Sensed invisibly in tune,—  
With a sun-derived stole

Like

Did inawhole

All her lovely body round;

Lovely her lucid body, with that light was interwoven

which lit that garden wholly,  
The sun ~~that~~ lit that garden wholly,  
Low and vibrant visible,  
Tempered glow, —

Sempere glory woke;  
And it seemed solely  
Like a silver thimble

Solemnly swung, slowly,  
Fuming clouds of golden fire, for a cloud of  
incense-smoked.

8.

But woe's me, and woe's me,

needed "scientist" to tell them) that the moon does not simply reflect the sun's rays, but absorbs and emits them again. This is distinctly promising. When science has drawn the corollary that they must needs be charged with the moon's own emanations, she will be on the way towards knowing a little of the heavens as the poets know them. She may even in time, attain to know:

The spirit of Night  
That drives round the stars in their fiery flight.'

Here is no unsophisticated warbler of childish nonsense to be patronized with comprehensive smiles of psychoanalytic complacency! Thompson's purely intellectual activity would have compared well with that of many men of scientific reputation. The point is strictly a divagation, but as this artist regarded his craft as at the service of the mystical faith, which also provokes unintelligent and ignorant contempt, it is worth stressing, and will be stressed in the succeeding chapters.

In his artistic travail with thought, Thompson uses not only the chinese-boxes of metaphorical imagery but larger imaginary units also. These immensely comprehensive, allegorizing, personifying, pictorial symbols are sometimes a succession of the wrapped-up metaphors such as Shakespeare uses to keep pace with his speeding thought, or the slower unfolding of a simile. The latter, which is a peculiarly oriental type of poetic imagery, is often used by Thompson, not with that leisurely and otiose out-spreading on the surface of the mind, but as a loose covering for a series of alternating metaphors. An illustration will make the form clear; the opening of 'From the Night of Forebeing':



Cast wide the folding doorways of the East,  
 For now is light increased!  
 And the wind-besomed chambers of the air,  
 See they be garnished fair;  
 And look the ways exhale some precious odours,  
 And set ye all about wild-breathing spice,  
 Most fit for Paradise!  
 Now is no time for sober gravity,  
 Season enough has Nature to be wise;  
 But now, discinct, with raiment glittering free,  
 Shakes she the ringing rafters of the skies—  
 With festal footing and bold joyance sweet,  
 And let the earth be drunken and carouse!  
 For lo, into her house  
 Spring is come home with her world-wandering feet . . .

Such passages have to be wrenched out of their context for quoting because they grow out of previous images and subside into succeeding images. This flexuous symmetry and complicated continuity of images and perceptions, supplies the concealed framework of the 'Sister Songs', which constitute, with no external rise and fall, beginning and fulfilment of design, the almost perfect whole of a single poem. The sections and the sections of sections bud and bloom and seed in the seasonal rhythm of the one garden. The images called up by the idea 'Thou whose young sex is yet but in thy soul', for example, end by passing into a manifold expression of the previous thought mingled with a reference to the prefiguring of Christian love in the nascent beauty of pagan nature; but ten times as many words could not paraphrase all the ideas in these lines:

So once, ere Heaven's eyes were filled with wonders  
 To see Laughter rise from Tears,  
 Lay in beauty not yet mighty,  
 Conch'd in translucencies,  
 The antenatal Aphrodite,

Caved magically under magic seas;  
Caved dreamlessly beneath the dreamful seas.

Thompson's poetry is rather like a river in spate when it becomes rhetorical and magniloquent, but in most of his 'bubbling melodies', however wide the stream of the poetry, the language has this contained power. Where, superficially, the reader might expect economy of words, in the tight little stanzas of 'To the Dead Cardinal' or 'To Any Saint', the poetry is intermittent; the power is too repressed. Such metrical forms testify to the fertility of the poet's mind, which has to perform acrobatic feats between rhymes only four, or two words apart. As Theodore Watts-Dunton, reviewing Swinburne in the *Athenæum*, said, rhyme and metre are means of arousing the truly poetic mind to bring forth fresh resources out of deeper and more obscure regions.

But if such external pressure of form constrains too straitly the thought, instead of scooping deeper it will leap into the air of bald matter-of-fact, or epigrammatic prose: the current of evocation will be discontinuous. And this is noticeably the result at moments when Thompson has imposed a needlessly mechanical task upon his Muse.

Life is a coquetry  
Of Death, which wearies me,  
Too sure  
Of the amour,<sup>1</sup>

is a witty epigram. He tries to plunge back in the succeeding stanza, but cannot maintain any profundity:

A tiring-room where I  
Death's diverse garments try,  
Till fit  
Some fashion sit.

<sup>1</sup> 'To the Dead Cardinal', Vol. I.

The thought will not continuously develop. It is almost a rule without exception in Thompson's poetry that the straiter the rhyme scheme, the tighter the stanza, the smaller the rhythmic wave, so less profound is the imagery and the creative energy weaker. He was artist enough to discover this fairly early in his development, that is to say in 'Sister Songs', which as a triumphant testing of his Muse's power of flight is comparable in its relation to the rest of his work with the 'Endymion' of Keats and the 'Alastor' or 'The Revolt of Islam' of Shelley. As Mr. Garvin immediately pointed out, however, 'The Hound of Heaven' is so close in manner and spirit to 'Sister Songs' that it might be regarded as a continuation of a soliloquy, and as a soliloquy in English poetry, these two come second to Shakespeare's sonnets, though the suggestion that there is no third might be tempered by the reminder of Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality'.

Thompson's strong sense of rhythm is native to his plangent imagination, but his usually successful employment of metres is a sign of craftsmanship. That he adapted some of Patmore's notions to *New Poems* is remarked later on; but for his greatest achievements he needs a free play of rhythm within a roomy metrical scheme to allow space for the giant blossoming of his imaginative figures.

The astounding start of the *Pæmion* of 'An Anthem of Earth', and the opening section of the ode, 'Peace', depend on the rhetorical device already illustrated, of folded metaphors again enfolded. The poet in a briefer piece will maintain that intellectual, allegorizing uniformity across the whole span of the poem, as in 'Assumpta Maria', and if he had sufficiently con-

trolled the inspirational uprush of 'The Mistress of Vision' that entrancing poem would have escaped the flaw which may be felt in it of a discontinuity between stanzas 9 and 10. Probably the new direction of the mood made the unsettlement unavoidable. On the first printed proofs of *New Poems*, Thompson writes a note on the new element in his work 'which is transcendental rather than truly mystic. The opening poem is a fantasy with no more than an allusive tinge of psychic significance.' The difference which can be felt between stanza 9 and stanza 10 of the poem is probably the beginning of the transveyance from what the poet means by 'transcendental' to what he means by 'truly mystic'. When the change is completed temporarily the poetry is farthest from the magical enchantment of the inspiration which produced the first part. Stanza 20, for instance:

Pierce thy heart to find the key;  
 With thee take  
 Only what none else would keep;  
 Learn to dream when thou dost sleep;  
 Learn to water joy with tears,  
 Learn from fears to vanquish fears,  
 To hope, for thou dar'st not despair,  
 Exult, for that thou dar'st not grieve:  
 Plough the rock until it bear;  
 Know, for thou else couldst not believe;  
 Lose, that the lost thou may'st receive;  
 Die, for none other way canst live.

This is, so far, an intrusion which almost completely dissipates the enchantment, and the artist in the poet knew it. The remainder of the same stanza is an attempt to reawaken the spell without losing the explicit argument:

When earth and heaven lay down their veil,  
 And that apocalypse turns thee pale;  
 When thy seeing blindeth thee  
 To what thy fellow-mortals see;  
 When their sight to thee is sightless;  
 Their living, death; their light, most lightless;  
 Search no more.  
 Pass the gates of Luthany, tread the region Elenore.

The poet's consciousness of certain psychic implications in the magical atmosphere of the paradise where 'The Mistress of Vision' dwells took the forms in which his mystical faith could make explicit what ought to have been left deep buried in the heart. In 'The Hound of Heaven' he maintains the artistic unity because the mystical purport was conscious from the beginning and accordingly his intellect, forewarned, was able to direct the powerful flow of imagery and music through a prepared channel. If 'The Hound of Heaven' has a weakness it is that the marvellous continuity of symbols flowing one out of another cannot be maintained unbroken through the whole length of the Ode; the current of inspiration cannot keep its pressure because the embanking argument widens out suddenly; the imagination after 'Naked I wait Thy love's uplifted stroke!' is spread out over such sundered conceptions as are suggested by the sword image; the robbery during sleep; the pillar-shaking Samson; the conflagration of accumulated time; the burst bubbles on the stream of life; the dreamer failed by his dream, and the music-maker by his instrument; the chains of imagery by which he 'swung the earth' at his wrist; ropes that snap when holding so heavy an anchor; Love as a weed choking the life of transient loves with immortal death; the designer with a charcoal crayon

made out of a man; the exhausted fountain, and broken fount where the last moisture is drunk up by the dust; moisture of grief, 'Dark thoughts' shivering on sighful branches of the mind: all that the pulp, what is the rind to be? The metaphors are fine, but they are not profoundly united in another embracing conception which itself would be a phase of the argument; they are each reiterated illustrations of the argument, but

I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds;  
Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds  
From the hid battlements of Eternity;  
Those mists a space unsettle, then  
Round the half-glimps'd turrets slowly wash again.

is too powerful a culmination of the series and instead of binding it into a unity before the poem waves forward again it blows up a spray which reflects a new vision. This is superbly woven into the theme by the next sentence:

But not ere him who summoneth  
I first have seen . . .

Nevertheless although we are swept forward to the approaching estuary of eternal Love, the journey has been perilously endangered. How then does the poet triumph over every distraction and excess of ideas? It is not by the magical music of 'The Mistress of Vision'. Such magic is in verbal melody woven into the incantation of metre. There is no trace in 'The Hound of Heaven' of any process comparable with Tennyson's casting out of the s's. The poet is careless of consonantal and vowel cacophonies; he treats them, and perhaps he can afford to treat them, as minor accidents submerged in the emotional flood

and metrical harmony. 'The Hound of Heaven' is a rhythmical masterpiece burying under its movement many æsthetic flaws. Metrical variation is used to pound out the rhythm and to compensate for the lapses of creative power. So in 'The Mistress of Vision', to recover the vanishing enchantment of the song, the poet introduces a kind of vamping metre to alternate with the rhythmical current. A favourite device is the breaking of a sequence of trochaic lines of four stresses with short lines of two stresses, consisting of a trochee and a spondee, to make a vamping pause, e.g.:

On Golgotha there grew a thorn  
Round the long-figured Brows.  
Mourn, O mourn!

For the vine have we the spine? Is this all the Heaven allows?

This may be read:

$\cup : - \cup | - \cup | - \cup | - \wedge |$   
 $- \cup | - \cup | - \cup | - \wedge |$   
 $- \cup | - \wedge |$   
 $- \cup | - \cup | - \cup | - \wedge | - \cup | - \cup | - \cup | - \wedge |$

The trochee and spondee may be converted by the rhythm into that beautiful foot used so effectively in Browning's *Asolando*, the long-short-long, e.g. 'Mourn, O mourn!' in stanza 14, 'Joy and fear!' in 15, 'O dismay!' and 'Ere begun' in 16, can be read  $-\cup-$ , and then the same unit can be heard in the middle of the trochaic lines, like an undercurrent of rhythm:

Round the long-figured Brows

$- \cup | (- \cup | -) \cup | - \wedge |$

'long-fig' is a unit subsidiary to the dominant metrical division of 'long-pre figured'. These fairly

simple uses of metre to strengthen the inner rise and fall that is properly called the rhythm are briefly quoted because Thompson attempted to obey Patmore's principle of making the single verse (i.e. the line) reflect the emotional rhythm, an unnecessary and injurious ambition, since it can only weaken the resources which a poet has to exploit in metre. As a matter of fact the Odes in which Thompson comes nearest to Patmore's use of metre are generally his second-best poems, like 'By Reason of Thy Law' and 'The Dread of Height'. It is a device which suited Patmore's less spontaneous and powerful inspiration, but it has impoverished the orchestral texture of several of Thompson's important poems, like 'From the Night of Forebeing', 'Of Nature: Land and Plaint', 'Laus Amara Doloris', and even the powerful 'Orient Ode'. How needless it was for Thompson is seen in the surging rhythm of his blank verse. 'The Anthem of Earth' is as masterly a stretch of harmony between rhythm and metre as you shall find in English poetry. Carrying tremendous images it gives to the poem the force of a thunder-bolt. Thompson's triumphs of craftsmanship are the natural harvest of the plentiful inspiration. That native genius laughs at æsthetic flaws which would almost annihilate the expression of a smaller poet. His poetry was the very outgrowth of his vital self, and he knew both the glory and the agony of serving his 'Urania'.

The poet is not lord  
Of the next syllable may come  
With the returning pendulum;  
And what he plans to-day in song,  
To-morrow sings it in another tongue.  
Where the last leaf fell from his bough,



FRANCIS THOMPSON

He knows not if a leaf shall grow;  
Where he sows he does not reap,  
He reapeth where he did not sow;  
He sleeps, and dreams forsake his sleep  
To meet him on his waking way.  
Vision will mate him not by law and vow:  
Disguised in life's most hodden-grey,  
By the most beaten road of every-day.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sister Songs.*

## CHAPTER IV

### HIS IMAGINATIVE TYPE

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*'The harmony of her matchless graces . . . has kept heaven real and open to me, and I sense the spring of Paradise amidst the wintry world.'*—JOHN O'CONNOR ('Commentary' on '*Mistress of Vision*', st. xxiii).

THE generalization made by Mr. Chesterton, that the briefest definition of the Victorian age was that Thompson stood outside it, contains of course—as Mr. Chesterton's best generalizations always do—a part of essential truth. Thompson was regrettably 'un-English', according to Victorian standards, and the very antithesis of the Tennyson represented in Taine's somewhat too impressionistic summary. His work is marked by a quality to which he has affixed the exact and definitive phrase 'ardorous abandonment'. It is the quality he found in Crashaw. But he is remarkable for combining this with an intellectual energy worthy of Donne, and a magic very nearly worthy of Coleridge. Adapting Mr. Chesterton's scheme, one might say that the best definition of French poetry of religion is that it is separated by a deep gulf from Thompson. This implies, as we shall see, that it is also alien to the rich strain of religious poetry which provides Thompson with much of his background, all that body of seventeenth-century work which was a reaction against the Elizabethan renaissance and a cultivation of new fields of spiritual adventure. The religious poetry of the seventeenth century is akin to and was at times inspired by the Spanish romance and mysticism. There is nothing like it in French literature, unless one makes an exception of modern French poetry,

that is to say of the poetry which was taught by Baudelaire to thrill with new mysteries, and by the school of Laforgue and Rimbaud, to tear away the veils of familiar convention from literature in order that the spirit might reassert itself. Until this, except for premonitory signs in the romantic daring of Hugo, French religious poetry was almost a wilderness of orthodoxy and formalism. The true poets fled from the mood of Christian worship; any new blossom of poetry in that area seemed doomed to perish. What became of the posterity of Brébeuf? Is there anything worth a song after Louis Racine and J. B. Rousseau? And even such as these, how coldly 'official' is their religious poetry compared with the intimacies and fervent sincerities of Crashaw, Donne, Vaughan, Traherne and Herbert. French poetry has only in modern times acquired any sort of tradition of mystical poetry. It is likely that Thompson may have an important influence on the new French poetry, which has a much more subtle instrument of expression for what may be called 'metaphysical' imagery than it had before Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Laforgue broke up the new conventions which were formed by the Parnassians reacting against a decadent Romanticism. French romantic poetry was given a tradition by Victor Hugo, and this strange, impetuous torrent of a genius has obvious resemblances to Thompson. It is not accidental that Thompson's few exercises in translation should have been the result of reading Hugo, who has a vivid pictorial imagination which is also fluent, and delights in passing from picture to picture, though it rarely passes from idea to idea with the speed of the true metaphysical poet. Hugo's success in verse is largely the fortunate

coincidence of a powerful imagination with a language which by its very limitations in suggestion was fitted to the singularly limited, self-repeating mind of the poet. The language used with such mastery by Hugo was an instrument better fitted to make cameos of beautiful clear statements than the 'immortal clarities' which Thompson heard sighing past him in Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound'. When Hugo is not understandable at first glance, he is merely writing badly: the cause is never profundity of thought. French poetry is only just approaching the definite subtleties of thought-projection which Shelley, a hundred years ago, was able to draw out of English. And that peculiarity of English was due, apart from the omnipresent influence of Shakespeare, to the need of the religious seventeenth-century writers for new fineness of recondite imagery. The mood which actuated them was often, as it is in Crashaw and Vaughan, similar to that of the Spanish mystics. Thompson is likely to influence French poetry in two ways, first as an example of the 'metaphysical' poet of gorgeous language and romantic mood, secondly as the greatest poet of Catholicism since Dante. With two poets so unlike one another as Francis Jammes and Paul Claudel, modern French poetry began to run in a new channel of personal Catholicism. Neither M. Francis Jammes, who is not unlike Alice Meynell in a certain statuesque simplicity, or the versatile and rhetorical M. Paul Claudel, resemble Thompson except in being poets of a mystical faith, so far as a comparison of their work would suggest; but Thompson may nevertheless have affected the work of these two leaders of French Catholic poetry. M. Claudel has translated, besides a good deal of

Patmore, Thompson's 'Corymbus for Autumn', while M. Jammes knows the skilful translations by M. Auguste Morel of some of Thompson's finest work, including 'The Anthem of Earth' and the 'Hound of Heaven'. The achievements of M. Morel, in translating Thompson, and of M. Valery Larbaud in the translating not only of Thompson but of poets as significant in this context as Patmore and Coleridge are contributory signs of the growing capacity of French verse for the poetry of exact nuances, evocation of dream atmosphere, and concrete expression of mystical abstractions. Thompson's French contemporary, let us remember, was Verlaine, and Verlaine, using the instrument as it was fashioned by Baudelaire, Laforgue, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé introduced into French the nearest approach to that mystical expression of reality which is much more Spanish and English than French; the Spanish expression being more often romantic, the English more often magical. This is not a subject which can be allowed to lead us from the further consideration of Thompson's poetic genius. The contrast with all but certain modern developments of French poetry, which is brought out by setting his work beside the French, will be found evident enough. A certain approach of temperament might possibly be traced between Thompson and Verlaine, so that the emotion and the poignant suggestions of Verlaine's music are often felt in the English poet's work, which contains also the ardent imagination, the dionysiac rage, and the loneliness of Rimbaud.

Thompson might, without any serious distortion of perspective, be described as a poet of the Divine Mother; this implies that he is also the poet of a

divine paradise which is essentially a transfiguration of an earthly paradise. The emotional and ecclesiastical qualities of his paradise are sketched in the comparison with Shelley, but it is important to realize how his poetry is enriched and inspired by this theme or mood. Mystical literature has always found expressive symbolism in the garden and in the mother, two conceptions which are interwoven and continually reappear in religion and poetry. This vision of paradise is frequently the liturgical or imaginative aspect of Thompson's mystical love of death and of pain, the interchangeable keys of the peaceful paradise. When the Father of Heaven enters into the vision, there is no change in the spiritual tone, which is that of a child's feeling of atonement with its mother. If Thompson does, in obedience to convention, picture the hierarchy of heaven with some completeness, the Father is a mere Voice, a foil to the feminine grace of Mary and the Seraphim, as in 'The Making of Viola'. The very angels are maidens in 'A Judgment in Heaven'; when the poor rhymist approaches the shade of the Poet's glory:

Fearfully hoping a distant welcome as a poor kinsman of his lays.  
 The angels laughed with a lovely scorning: 'Who has done this sorry  
 deed in  
 The garden of our Father, God?'

The terrible Divine Lover who is God is the poet's own knowledge of the 'dazzling darkness' wherein all earthly values are inverted; it is the feminine aspect, especially the maternal aspect of that other world which symbolizes for him the reality from which he is *separated* by walls of sense. The theme of pursuit is lost in the forlorn hunger for attainment when instead of 'The Hound of Heaven' he sings 'The

Mistress of Vision'. Silence, stillness, 'a fair white silence' of rapturous peace which is given at the price of pain, belong to his paradise.' Consider that lovely close to 'Her Portrait':<sup>1</sup>

There regent Melancholy wide controls;  
 There Earth- and Heaven-Love play for aureoles;  
 There Sweetness out of Sadness breaks at fits,  
 Like bubbles on dark water, or as flits  
 A sudden silver fin through its deep infinites;  
 There amorous Thought has sucked pale Fancy's breath,  
 And Tenderness sits looking toward the lands of Death:  
 There Feeling stills her breathing with her hand,  
 And Dream from Melancholy part wrests the wand;  
 And on this lady's heart, looked you so deep,  
 Poor Poetry has rocked himself to sleep:  
 Upon the heavy blossom of her lips  
 Hangs the bee Musing; nigh her lids eclipse  
 Each half-occulted star beneath that lies;  
 And, in the contemplation of those eyes,  
 Passionless passion, wild tranquillities.

This Dian is a twin-sister of the Lady who is the 'Mistress of Vision', a poem which adds to the suggestive depths of this portrait the more evocative imagery of awe and mystery, and a chanting metre. The function of verse as an incantation is well illustrated by this comparison. While the studied richness of the above lines might find parallels in French verse, such would scarcely be found before Verlaine for the evocative atmosphere of 'The Mistress'. The metre is a kind of mental tom-tom, less violently playing on the nerves than the material tom-tom, but reinforced by the poet's spiritual orchestra of mood and image and verbal music. The union of this spiritual orchestra, a background of implicit reality, with the controlling,

<sup>1</sup> 'Love in Dian's Lap'.

expressive scheme of the baton's movements, often produces effects beyond the conscious purpose or calculation of the conductor. There are several reasons for the incalculable element in æsthetic expression, strange correspondences between matter and spirit, between rhythms and emotions, and the unfathomable associative power of certain ideas of universal as well as particular import, such as death, birth, darkness, motherhood, good and evil, love and hate, pain and joy. It is as if we are all listeners awaiting some yet unheard phrase which when it sounds opens hidden windows in the soul.

What is essentially irrational cannot be defined finally in rational language; this can only weave a circle round the ineludible mystery, 'the smouldering core', which is at the heart of all creation. Each creation has to be a new experience of the whole self, of which the reason is the least significant and the most superficial element. Nevertheless the reason aids the transcending of itself by the complete intelligence: it can circle the mysteries, though the soul will make its ultimate discoveries in advance of the reason. The degree in which by intuitive understanding one may penetrate the paradise of a poet like Thompson is limited at last by the personal response, but there is a wide variation of understanding which reflects the intellectual sensitiveness of the reader. One reader may appreciate sooner than another, for instance, that one of Thompson's favourite images is, in superficially changing appearance, an estuary or canal down which press the latest births of time. He is especially fond of this image to express the very process of intuition, which modern æsthetic theory has tried to identify with expression itself.



There is no necessity to search for this image. One comes across it constantly in his work, though it appears under altered forms, as in:

The precious streams which through thy young lips roll  
Shall leave their lovely delta in thy soul,<sup>1</sup>

which is a kind of reminiscence of the profounder image:

Oh! may this treasure-galleon of my verse,  
Fraught with its golden passion, oared with cadent rhyme,  
Set with a towering press of fantasies,  
Drop safely down the time,  
Leaving mine isled self behind it far  
Soon to be sunken in the abysm of seas  
(As down the years the splendour voyages  
From some long ruined and night-submerged star),  
And in thy subject sovereign's havening heart  
Anchor the freightage of its virgin ore;  
Adding its wasteful more  
To his own overflowing treasury.  
So through his river mine shall reach thy sea. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Here, instead of incompleteness of expression, the dominant image is overlaid with others, like the distracting splendour of that image of the light still travelling through space from a star gone out years before—one of the many signs of the poet's appropriation of scientific truth. Closer to the original feeling of the image is this:

From cloud-zoned pinnacles of the secret spirit  
Song falls precipitant in dizzying streams.

In 'Before Her Portrait in Youth' occurs in another context:

As gale to gale drifts breath  
Of blossoms' death,

<sup>1</sup> *Sister Songs.*

So, dropping down the years from hour to hour,  
 This dead youth's scent is wafted me to-day. . . .<sup>1</sup>

where once more is revealed the idea of the passage from timeless eternity into momentary time. And the same poem concludes with a reversion of the motive:

The water-wraith that cries  
 From those eternal sorrows of thy pictured eyes  
 Entwines and draws me down their soundless intricacies.

An image nearly paralleled in 'The Mistress of Vision'.

This re-entering of eternity is constantly expressed by Thompson in descriptions of woman's eyes, and we perceive how he is using the material symbolism of conception and birth for immaterial relations of the self and what the philosophers call the not-self; the pre-natal state of complete envelopment is a symbol of the enfolding of the spirit in the Divine Love. Thus in 'Sister Songs', the mother whose poetry is prattled by her little girl, supplies to the poet an image of relationship essentially similar to his own relationship with the 'Mistress of Vision'. The mother poet repeats on the spiritual plane what she did on the physical plane for her child:

Not vainly has she wrought,  
 Not vainly from the cloudward-jetting turret  
 Of her aerial mind for thy weak feet  
 Let down the silken ladder of her thought.

Therefore the poet can speak also of bringing to birth and of suckling his own poems, and in the same symbolism the mind's creative function is imaged, as in those 'jetting tops of thought' in 'The Cloud's Swan-Song'.

<sup>1</sup> *Sister Songs*.

The eyes, which are always mystical windows to Thompson, by reversing the process of birth into time, take him back in Paradise. The significance of 'The Mistress of Vision' in Thompson's work is that the mood in which he sings until, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> he makes the mystical meaning explicit and interrupts the magic, is that of the momentary dweller in the paradise. The gorgeous imagery and chanting music are called up out of this mood, which the poet shares with us, so that his Eden becomes ours. We all make our private Edens, and the artists catch them in their mirroring souls. Though Adam and Eve were cast out, the poets have crept back and, like adventurous boys who steal guarded apples, have slipped under the hedges, outfaced the flame-besworded wardens of Paradise, and brought back some of the shining fruit of their vision. Not baseless fabric after all; we know the fruit. The significance of human life is in the loss and the seeking of the Garden of Eden. There is a scientific 'theory of intra-uterine Blessedness', according to which the universal belief in a happy Paradise is explained as a vague memory of the pre-natal experience in the mother's womb. That there is some truth in this, the poetry of Thompson alone would show; but the poetry of Thompson alone will also indicate far more than this. The symbolism used by the mystics is the only complete expression of reality so far as the human mind can know it. All peoples have had their story of the heaven and hell of the human heart, for the story in Genesis is older than Babylon. There is always some fearful warden to be outfaced, some dragon within to be conquered by the self before the Isles of

<sup>1</sup> Page 69 above.

the Blest or the gardens of the Hesperides or the Beatific Life are gained. It is a promised reward of universal validity to

Shew thee the tree, leafed with refinèd gold,  
Whereon the fearful dragon held his seat,  
That watched the garden called Hesperides.

The remembered Age of Gold must reach far back. It may be that those dark months we spent in a human womb do rehearse the long drama of that backward and abysm of time, but the 'intra-uterine Blessedness' theory must be made to hold the entire universe of man ere it will contain all the paradises dreamed by him, for these paradises are more final than the philosopher's ultimate truth: they are gardens which have grown in the native soil of religious human nature. If, indeed, we come trailing clouds of glory with us, they are from skies unknown to astronomers and wildly guessed at by psychologists. Francis Thompson's distinction among the poets of Paradise is that he extended the boundaries of Eden until they included those of the material universe, for he knew that the human heart was more capacious than the starry firmament. His 'Mistress of Vision', because she is the fullest expression of his deep knowledge of the heart, commands no local or segregated paradise, but swings the great globe of earth as a censer in the flaming garden of God. Of Thompson more than most poets might one quote Emerson's lines on 'Experience':

The sun set; but set not his hope:  
Stars rose; his faith was earlier up:  
Fixed on the enormous galaxy,  
Deeper and older seemed his eye;

FRANCIS THOMPSON

And *matched his sufferance sublime*  
The *taciturnity of time*.  
He spoke, and words more soft than rain  
Brought back the Age of Gold again.

## CHAPTER V

COVENTRY PATMORE

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*'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church.'*

—ST. PAUL.

*'Whithersoever the soul of man turns itself, unless to Thee, it cleaves unto sorrow; yea, even though it cleave to the fairest things. . . .'*—ST. AUGUSTINE.

THE above quotations will serve as texts for a comparison of Patmore's and Thompson's vision of reality and philosophy of life. Patmore is the Pauline disciple; Thompson is the Augustinian. The two sayings quoted are not mutually exclusive or contradictory, but they each stress a distinct phase of truth, and indicate a different temperament. The resemblances between Patmore and Thompson are entirely superficial; two poets could hardly be more distinct in temperament and in art.

This will be most readily apprehended in a consideration of the evidence for their sympathetic approach to one another as human beings, and of such poems as betray the influence of the more virile intellect of Patmore over the hero-worshipping friend. No poet was ever less of a hero-worshipper than Coventry Patmore; but what other poet, unless it be Swinburne, was more inclined to this means of symbolizing ideals than Thompson? We have Thompson's own statement of how he admired Patmore. There is first the well-known Dedication of *New Poems*, and the note:

'This dedication was written while the dear friend and great Poet to whom it was addressed yet lived.

It is left as he saw it—the last verses of mine that were to pass under his eyes.’

There is the letter he wrote to Patmore’s widow:

‘I am shocked and overcome to hear of your—and my—bereavement. There has passed away the greatest genius of the century, and from me a friend whose like I shall not see again; one so close to my own soul that the distance of years between us was hardly felt. . . .’

There is the poem ‘A Captain of Song (on the portrait of Coventry Patmore by J. Sargent, A.R.A.)’, to which Thompson added an interesting note:

‘As the meaning of this poem cannot be appreciated without the knowledge that it was written to a living man, and bears references to spiritual experience and not to death, the reader has now to take note of its date—the summer of 1895.’<sup>1</sup>

The poet declares that only the spiritually elect may look upon the portrait and know the man, for

He has trod the ways afar,  
The fatal ways of parting and farewell,  
Where all the paths of pained greatness are; . . .  
You the stern pities of the gods debar  
To drink where he has drunk  
The moonless mere of sighs,  
And pace the places infamous to tell,  
Where God wipes not the tears from any eyes,  
Where through the ways of dreadful greatness are:  
He knows the perilous rout  
That all those ways about

<sup>1</sup> Quoted, with the poem, in Basil Champney’s *Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore*, Vol. II.

Sink into doom, and sinking, still are sunk.  
 And if his sole and solemn term thereout  
 He has attained, to love ye shall not dare  
 One who has journeyed there . . . .

The poet continues 'Ye shall mark well the mighty cruelties which arm and mar that countenance of control.' If any shall 'with reverent piety' approach 'this strong, sad soul of Sovereign Song' they will be such as have 'trod the self-same path'.

Thompson in referring to that purgative suffering seems implicitly to realize that his own path was not parallel with the older poet's. No sympathetic reader of Patmore's poetry could fail to realize what stern warfare with himself had made him the patriarchal figure pictured by Sargent, and the reverend figure revered by Thompson; but Thompson's admiration and sympathetic understanding of pain do not weigh against those very differences of temperament which placed him in a close relationship with Patmore. As for the artistic influence, Thompson himself appears to be more conscious of it than a true poetic disciple would be.

There is the note (it appears at the end of Vol. I of his *Collected Works*) in which he tells us:

'One image in the "Proem" (of *Sister Songs*) was an unconscious plagiarism from the beautiful image in Mr. Patmore's "Saint Valentine's Day":

O baby Spring,  
 That flutter'st sudden 'neath the breast of Earth,  
 A month before the birth!

Finding I could not disengage it without injury to the passage in which it is embedded, I have preferred to leave it, with this acknowledgment to a Poet rich enough to lend to the poor.'



The reader can hardly help feeling that this note reveals Thompson's modesty and his admiration rather than plagiarism. The quoted imagery is not even original to Patmore; nor, probably, was it to Shelley, nor to Shakespeare, both of whom, long before Patmore, had used this or similar imagery for the season of flowery births. The ode 'Saint Valentine's Day' is very fine, but it is radically different in content from the 'Proem' of *Sister Songs*, and when the reader, duly apprised of Thompson's 'unconscious plagiarism', endeavours to identify it, he comes no nearer than this:

For Spring leaps in the womb of the young year!  
 Nay, was it not brought forth before,  
 And we waited, to behold it,  
 'Till the sun's hand should unfold it,  
 What the year's young bosom bore?

A most interesting contrast with Patmore's lines, which keep close to the concrete expression of one idea until the poet is ready for another to succeed it in his line of thought, strictly *line* of thought. The very first of these verses by Thompson is a port-manteau of ideas. The concrete image opens up metaphysical vistas of the periodicity of time as well as of nature; the second notion is then amplified, with an unpremeditated daring such as one never finds in Patmore's sculpturesque poetry.

Thompson thought it necessary to state also that the 'Ode to the Setting Sun' was written and published before John Davidson's 'Ballad of a Nun', 'in view of a considerable resemblance between' the final stanza of the Ode and the well-known stanza of the Ballad in which the Nun proclaims herself henceforth the sister of the sun and sister of the moon.

While clearing himself in this way of a hypothetical charge of plagiarism, he recalls that several critics have stated that the metre of 'The Hound of Heaven' was modelled on Patmore's Ode metre. Therefore, since 'The Ode to the Setting Sun' was published before he had seen any of Patmore's work, a comparison of this with 'The Hound of Heaven' will 'show exactly the extent to which the later poem was affected by that great poet's practice'. Taking him at his word, we should find in the 'Hound' an access of skill, as compared with the 'Setting Sun', in the control of rhythmical pauses, but little change in manner, except towards the more critical employment of colourful words. The imagery is more mystical, but it is original. When he continues: 'The ode metre of *New Poems* is, with this exception, completely based on the principles which Mr. Patmore may virtually be said to have discovered', we have something more complicated in the way of evidence.

Instead of making the comparison suggested by Thompson, a comparison which heavily discounts influence of Patmorean technique, a more promising one is between the earlier 'Ode to the Setting Sun' and the later 'Orient Ode'. Here certainly is a noticeable change in the management of metre; and the change brings the later Ode much closer to Patmore's style. In the 'Ode to the Setting Sun' the rhythm is often reminiscent of Spenser and Keats; in the 'Orient Ode' there is clearly a successful attempt on Thompson's part to obey the metrical principle of the Eros Odes, that length of line should fluctuate with the emotional content. But, in his own words, 'every great poet makes accepted metre a quite new metre . . . impresses his own individuality

upon it', and examination of this *rapprochement* of the two poets, as usual, reveals the depth of their unlikeness. Since we are not concerned only with technical influences here, we have to note while seeking for signs of Patmore's influence in the 'Orient Ode' the very individual content of the poem, which is much more ecclesiastical in imagery and theological in theme than that 'to the Setting Sun'. The style of the two poets seems markedly different (as would be inevitable if the content of their poetry also differed), but it is just on this one point that Thompson is most sensitive. And yet, with all his apparent anxiety to admit a debt to Patmore, he was always notably careful to maintain his spiritual independence. At first he was even antagonistic to the Patmorean philosophy of human and divine love. Before reviewing *Religio Poetæ* he lent it to Father Anselm, a mutual friend of the poets, who had taken part in their talks at Pantasaph. Previously he had refused to accept some of Patmore's main ideas, until after consultation with another spiritual adviser. He is only gradually brought under the influence of Patmore's positive personality, the bonds of sympathy being forged chiefly at Pantasaph.

'Friar and seer between them enclosed him at evening in the monastic parlour. Patmore writes home: "Francis Thompson and all the Fathers spent two hours last night in my room, and we had excellent talk. Father Anselm and I had a long talk about nuptial love, and he went all lengths with me in honour of the marriage embrace."'<sup>1</sup>

What especially appealed to Thompson in Patmore's

<sup>1</sup> 'Life' (Chap. IX).

talk and poetry was the interpretation of symbols. He finds that Patmore is 'deeply perceptive of the Scriptures' symbolic meanings, scouted by moderns', but he adds (significantly, because it shows that the source of his agreement with Patmore was beyond the bounds of personal influence—rooted in the heart which sang of 'The Mistress of Vision'): 'In proportion to the height of their sanctity the saints are inevitable poets. Sanctity is essential song.' Sanctity meant to Thompson something that Patmore as a poet does not celebrate. We find Thompson, as a result of reading *Religio Poetæ*, writing to the author, but mainly to show him the 'Orient Ode' and to explain that the coincidences in their ideas are not due to plagiarism on his part. But he does not hesitate to charge his poem with echoing Patmore's manner, 'in the metre, and even in some of the diction'. An interesting correspondence follows, in which Patmore is the leading spokesman on symbolism, Thompson occasionally thanking Patmore for correcting him, or for merely corroborating something he 'had substantially discerned' or written about already. But better evidence still is Patmore's letter following their discussion, saying: 'Thank you for your very interesting letter, which shows me how extraordinarily alike are our methods of and experience in contemplation.' This is not written to an acknowledged disciple.

The significant truth is that both poets were students of the same almost universal religious symbolism, which has always had an esoteric sexual implication. Both belonging to the one church, they not surprisingly met on the common ground of sibylline wisdom. The observations on mythological and liturgical

imagery in their letters follow the direction of many jottings in Thompson's scrappy note-books more consistently than they follow the Patmorean idea of human and divine love. Looking through these note-books, one is struck by the entire absence of any sort of arrangement of material, and impressed also by the evidence of curious and wide reading in comparative religion. This, if one may judge by what the poet thought interesting enough to jot down, is mainly a search for symbols. He makes a rough drawing of symbols found in ancient stone ruins in Yucatan, and then compares them with Indian sacred symbols. He is very interested in Egypt, and he will speculate on the identity of Syrian and Egyptian gods and goddesses and the meanings of symbols associated with them. After one of these little dissertations (it is a good example of the casual nature of his raw material) he makes a note on Lord Lytton's use of the word *Noek*, and queries if it should be *Lok* or *Loki*, as he had never come across *Noek*; then it occurs to him that *Noek* may be a form of *Nick*. So when Patmore writes to him about such symbolism as that of the *West* which he had used, confusedly he thinks, in his 'Orient Ode', he replies: 'You rather overlook the purport of my inquiry in regard to the symbolic question. I wanted to know if there had been any actual progressive development among the nations with regard to the quarter in which they worshipped—as an historic fact, apart from symbolic meaning. But this is such a minor matter, and the concluding hint of your letter contains so much of value to me, that I am not sorry you misapprehended me. . . . It is enough that my gaze should be set in the right direction; the rest may be safely left to the practised fixity of my looking.'

And he continues to amplify from his own reading and contemplation Patmore's remarks, which conclude with: 'Meantime I will only hint that the North represents the simple Divine virility, the South the Divine womanhood, the East their synthesis in the Holy Spirit, and the West the pure *natural* womanhood "full of grace".' But here the friends take us into a range of thought which demands a consideration outside this chapter.

The 'Orient Ode', which was partly the cause of the rare exchange of notes, is one of Thompson's most individual poems. The metre and diction, where it may be said to resemble Patmore's, is unfairly described as an echo, because there is not a single paragraph, not even—one is tempted to say—a single line which might have been written by the poet of *The Unknown Eros*. Where he does approach the more restrained manner of Patmore is in the frequent substitution of power for the earlier violence of diction. He is as poetically unfettered by theology as he is free of undue influence of Patmore; a search for the justification of his remark that the 'Orient Ode' 'was written soon after Easter, and was suggested by passages in the liturgies of Holy Saturday', brings to light no more than raw material used by an intensely poetic and original imagination. There is even a point of contrast with Patmore, who at times was given to furious political invective; the liturgies of Holy Saturday, from which Thompson professes to have got the suggestion for his ode, provides many texts for anathemas against the slayers of the Christ, and does not fail to stress the anger of God against Jerusalem, the 'city of malediction'; but what attracts Thompson in the liturgical literature is the prevision

of the resurrection of the Son, who had already become, for many poets, the *sun* of the soul. Of the sun, the ode says:

Art thou not life of them that live?  
Yea, in glad twinkling advent, thou doest dwell  
Within our body as a tabernacle!

It is the worship of Christ illuminated by magnificent nature imagery, which by its profundity contains anticipations (as profound poetic intuitions must always do) of later scientific knowledge. What here we are most concerned with is not the full scope of his profound intuitions, but how they compare with Patmore's. Thompson is throwing the riches of his imagination on the altar of worship. The sun is a splendid symbol, because it is the incarnated light. It is Christ. As the ode progresses the glorious movement of his mind effects a transfiguration of the imagery. Apostrophising the sun, he says:

Thou to thy spousal universe  
Art Husband, she thy Wife and Church.

It is the sudden intuition that the sun is a symbol.

Thou, for the life of all that live  
The victim daily born and sacrificed,  
To whom the pinion of this longing verse  
Beats but with fire which first thyself didst give,  
To thee, O Sun—or is't perchance to Christ?

And there is the attainment of the crest of that wave of intuitive thought which has been forming on the tidal surface of the song. In the gradual lapse of the final passage, the conception falls along the attained shore of his faith. His quest of the sun's secret has brought him the response, not only of knowledge which we call scientific, but of a conviction of 'Christ everywhere'.

One might well ask what such a poem has in common with the intuitions of *Unknown Eros* odes, except some universal elements of faith. It seems that Thompson owes much more to his other acknowledged source, the liturgies, than to Patmore's poetry, though, as we shall see, he owed a debt to Patmore's mind. In the liturgies we find that, while he ignores the jeremiads and anathemas, he is alert to such readings as *John* xii. verses 32—*et seq.* And Patmore must, at the least, share with liturgical readings the credit of causing other imagery and thought in this ode, such as that of 'the Spirit and the Bride' and of the Moon Woman, by whom

does Earth live, O Lord,  
Yet she for Earth, and both in Thee.

The Moon is Ashtaroth; and also Mary praised in the *Horae* of the 16th century:

We now seek the Tree of life who by the fruit of the forbidden tree once lost our life.

Only he who sees the Branch whereon is fixed the Fruit has found the Tree.

Our Faith shows us that the Fruit by which we live hangs on the Virgin's breast.

The Mary who is queen of Thompson's song (as Ashtaroth was queen of Patmore's, though Patmore called her also *Regina Coeli*) is both queen of Heaven and mother of the child in man. She is the most profound image in art and religion, and probably the most ancient.

'By Reason of Thy Law' and the ode which follows it in *Sight and Insight*, 'The Dread of Height', are undoubtedly closer in metrical pattern to the later odes of Patmore than any other of Thompson's poems, and they resemble Patmore in style as much as such divine



and very faulty excess can ever resemble classical art. These poems contain both faults and felicities which are not typical of Patmore. There is an unresolved battle here between Thompson's romantic magniloquence and his striving to say something with forceful directness. No Patmorean ode could be so wavering in the sequence of ideas as 'By Reason of Thy Law', nor mix up so inartistically excess with restraint of diction. Only in the powerful employment of words is Thompson here stronger than Patmore. Patmore nodding does not catch the eye as Thompson does; but one might say that if Thompson's poetry at such moments is moribund, Patmore's is dead, dead beyond hope. His finer serenity of style made him a useful model for Thompson, but, apart from the flat prose to be found in 'The Angel in the House', there is, even in the best of the odes, a frequent loss of all connection with the informing spirit of poetry. Thompson will confuse images, and moult feathers of incipient wayside songs at the expense of continuity; but Patmore, while keeping hold of the intellectual thread, can misuse words and images as Thompson never does at his worst. An intellectual conceit will cause him to manufacture such impossible associations as

Woven of gossamer and adamant,

and then to plunge along through a chaos of style and no style:

This subject loyalty which longs  
For chains and thongs  
Woven of gossamer and adamant,  
To bind me to my unguess'd want,  
And so to lie,  
Between those quivering plumes that thro' fine ether pant,  
For hopeless, sweet eternity?

What God unhonour'd hitherto in songs,  
 Or which, that now  
 Forgettest the disguise  
 That Gods must wear who visit human eyes,  
 Art Thou? <sup>1</sup>

Thompson never wrote so badly as this, or if he did, as in the 'Song of the Hours', it is a different kind of badness. Nor does one find in Thompson another characteristic fault of Patmore's, the epigrammatic but unpoetic and wasteful use of words.

The fardel coarse of customary life's  
 Exceeding injucundity.

This is not faulty poetry, it is the negation of poetry, and so is this otiose adjectivity:

Behoveful, zealous, beautiful, elect,  
 Mild, firm, judicious, loving, bold, discreet,  
 Without superfluosness, without defect,  
*Few are his words, and find but scant respect. . .*

One is tempted to reply to the question

How sing the Lord's Song in so strange a Land?

with which the poet opens the ode containing these lines, by referring to Francis Thompson's best poetry.

The success of the technique in Patmore's odes is due to his skill in rounding off the thought and in metrical emphasis. He is not native to high Heaven, and if he ventures to leap up, he falls back again. The inspiration, instead of imparting a comprehensive motion to the poem, causes, if the expression may be pardoned, a spasmodic orgasm that is too local to be described as ecstasy. His most famous line:

Through delicatest ether feathering soft their solitary beat

<sup>1</sup> 'To the Unknown Eros'.

projects in lone splendour above the surrounding diction. It is a *tour de force*. - Thompson's nearest approach to a *tour de force* is the marvellous verbal dance of 'The Making of Viola'.

These remarks will no doubt seem to Patmore's admirers one-sided, but they are not meant to be comprehensive. The subject under consideration is not Patmore, but Patmore compared (the logic of things has caused him to be contrasted) with Thompson. It was Patmore himself who said: 'My Catholicism was acquired, his inherent.' Read 'mysticism' as well as 'Catholicism' and you have the final statement of the difference between the two poets. Patmore is an intellectual. He is never so passionate as when attacking opponents or expounding metaphysical subtleties. It was Thompson, not Patmore, who said that 'mysticism is morality carried to the *nth* power', and it was Patmore who poetically asserted the mystical doctrine of sin in 'Let Be':

. . . Haply yon wretch, so famous for his falls,  
 Got them beneath the Devil-defended walls  
 Of some high Virtue he had vow'd to win;  
 And that which you and I  
 Call his besetting sin  
 Is but the fume of his peculiar fire  
 Of inmost contrary desire,  
 And means wild willingness for her to die,  
 Dash'd with despondence of her favour sweet;  
 He fiercer fighting, in his worst defeat,  
 Than I or you,  
 That only courteous greet  
 Where he does hotly woo,  
 Did ever fight, in our best victory.  
 Another is mistook  
 Through his deceitful likeness to his look!  
 Let be, let be:  
 Why should I clear myself, why answer thou for me?

That shaft of slander shot  
 Miss'd only the right blot.  
 I see the shame  
 They cannot see:  
 'Tis very just they blame  
 The thing that's not.

Thompson felt no need to set out the grounds for love or faith, and he was generally too occupied with a personal vision to show this concern, which Patmore shares with Browning, for questions of right or wrong, blame or praise. The odes, 'By Reason of Thy Law' and 'The Dread of Height', which are closer than most of Thompson's work to Patmore, not only in style but in matter, are really not doctrinal but a lyrical and romantic expression of mystical experience. In the 'Hound of Heaven' the poet was terribly pursued by that 'transient sweet' which under his 'Avernian sky' he now remembers with longing. In this dark night of the soul he is driven for refuge to 'Urania', his cruelly capricious mistress of song, so that he may at least proclaim the existence of that he sighs for and as yet is not:

When this morass of tears, then drained and firm,  
 Shall be a land—  
 Unshaken I affirm—  
 Where seven-quiured psalterings meet;  
 And all the gods move with calm hand in hand,  
 And eyes that know not trouble and the worn.

'The Dread of Height', which is another postscript to the experience in 'The Hound of Heaven', is prefaced by the Johannine warning: 'If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say: We see: your sin remaineth.' But the poem is not really doctrinal; it is a translation of the romantic saintliness of the Assisian into the terms of Thompsonian poetry.

At least St. Francis is an inspiring source of this poetic fear of spiritual pride, though many saints have known and recorded 'that dread theology', described by the poet singing out of his own heart:

These tidings from the vast to bring  
Needeth not doctor nor divine,  
Too well, too well  
My flesh doth know the heart-perturbing thing;  
That dread theology alone  
Is mine,  
Most native and my own;

and his 'conquered skies' which become 'a hollow mock' remind us of all that hell sonneted by Rossetti, the hell of those who have fallen away from heaven; but we are not reminded of Patmore.

Thompson had no need to argue his belief or assert intellectual grounds of knowledge. His song, instead of stepping heavenward on a carefully prepared ford of metaphysics, simply flies with the unerring knowledge of the heart. Thompson's interest in symbolism came after illumination. The consequence, given his richness of intellectual content, is poetry essentially all of a piece though careless at times or artistically naïve. It moves on a full, occasionally over-flooding, stream of intuitive knowledge. When Patmore's verse is most fervent it is a tempest rather than a flooding of the spirit. This is not simply because his themes are more earthy than Thompson's (Thompson is the finer poet of nature), but that he cannot harmonize thought and emotion completely; his feeling is at variance with his convictions. In his most intense creativeness the imagination traverses intellectually rocky ground, rather strenuously, like a runner; but Thompson's beats the loftiest air with pinions only then unfaltering.

Thompson's biographer quotes ample confessions by him of the liturgical and Biblical sources of his work. Thompson tells us to compare the Latin prose of the Vulgate even with the beautiful corresponding English of the Authorized Version; 'the advantage in music is not to the English, but to the soft and wooing fall of these deliciously lapsing syllables. (*Surge, propera, amica mea, columba mea, formosa mea, et veni*; that and the whole passage which follows, or that preceding strain closing in—*Fulcite me floribus, stipate me malis, quia amore langueo.*)'

But 'if the Vulgate be the fountain source, the rivers are numerous—and neglected'. There is the Breviary, 'with its Scriptural collocations over which has presided a wonderful symbolic insight'. And 'the offices of the Church are suggested poetry—that of the Assumption, for example, the "Little One" and almost all those of Our Lady'. Writing with an enclosure of poems, including the 'Assumpta Maria', which is 'vamped from the office of Our Lady', he acknowledges:

'They are almost entirely taken from the office of the Assumption, some from the Canticle, a few images from the heathen mythology. . . . You will perceive therefore the reason of the motto from Cowley: "Thou need'st not make new songs, but say the old."'

Evidence of this kind—and there is more of it—hardly leads, as his biographer makes it lead, up to the statement that 'there was no more choice for him in following Patmore than for a son born like his father. Such a poem as "By Reason of Thy Law" was born of the *Unknown Eros* odes.' In 'The After Woman' it is possible to see an etherialized

version of Patmorean ideas; and also in 'Assumpta Maria', which is in itself evidence that Thompson, inspired by Patmore, could find an important part of the symbolism of human and divine love within the Roman Catholic liturgical literature. Patmore's Greek sense of the gods did impress Thompson deeply, Mr. Richard de Bary assures me, because Thompson when he met Patmore had no personal guide except Mrs. Meynell. The beauty of Alice Meynell's poetry, it is scarcely necessary to say, has no point of contact at all with that of a natural mystic like Thompson. But the Greek sense of the gods is strong in the 'Ode to the Setting Sun', which appears to have been written in the same year as the 'Hound of Heaven' and *Sister Songs*, that is to say, before Thompson knew Patmore. And the emphasis in 'The After Woman' is not on the Patmorean and Pauline aspects introduced. Earthly love is represented as a 'starry treachury' to 'Tempt us back to Paradise'. For Patmore sexual love was a forecast and symbol of heaven. It is probable that Thompson would not have written 'The After Woman', and that 'Assumpta Maria' would have been less explicit, but for Patmore's doctrine. It is noticeable, however, that 'The After Woman' departs far from Patmore, sometimes seeming to expand with new poetry the final lines of Goethe's *Faust* (first four lines), then etherializing Patmore's 'Psyche', and finally identifying her with the divine Mary:

For ended is the Mystery Play,  
When Christ is life, and you the way.

Thompson read Patmore's translations from St. Bernard, and probably found himself closer to the

saint than to his translator. Patmore did not even pretend that in his allegory of human and divine love he was following St. Bernard and the great host of mediæval allegorizers down to St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. He wrote from Pantasaph that Father Anselm went all the way with him on the subject of nuptial love; one must, in the light of his poetry and prose, attribute that to his tactful and persuasive conversational account of his ideas, which would not have found acceptance with the Christian mystics except in certain general assumptions. Patmore was nevertheless a long way from being merely Solomonic. He was Greek. He wanted, as he suggests in 'The Contract', by harnessing sex energy to make the individual 'a son of God and Man'. Thompson never made a break with the purely Catholic ethos. When in 'The After Woman' he does try to express the Patmorean idea that human love can reverse the curse of Eden, he departs from the argument in the very expression, and the style has only to be compared with the poem which precedes it, in praise of Chastity, to prove that it is what I have called elsewhere 'Thompson rhetorical'.

But since it has been found necessary to make a reference<sup>1</sup> to the attempt of a psychoanalyst to elucidate the motives in Thompson's poetry, 'Assumpta Maria' as well as 'The After Woman' will serve as good examples, with the greater part of Patmore's odes and 'The Rod, the Root and the Flower', for a counterblast to the one-sided psychological explanations of the conscience. Patmore went deeply, and Thompson went some way and freely expressed his discoveries in poems like those quoted,

<sup>1</sup> Page 221.



into the problem of the 'Libido' or 'Cupido' (Patmore's 'Cupid'). The very title as well as the content of 'The Open Secret' shows the contrast. The agreement of the poets with the psychoanalysts is complete so far as the immense power and importance of the Cupido is concerned, to 'the life of them that live'. But what is to Jung, for example, a 'wandering spirit' is to Patmore a divine creative *purpose*, and so an expression of the formative divine Love in the world. Our excursion into the past in chapters 13 and 14 is only an examination of the vast background to the Christian Blessed Virgin and Mother which Thompson is able to sing anew. It is all implicit in the cosmo-liturgical order and splendour of the Thompsonian vision, though without the return to certain Greek qualities in the Patmorean system. Patmore was a great intellectual force and a profoundly original thinker whose researches, facilitated by his position at the British Museum, anticipated much of the valuable work of scholars like Gilbert Murray, Jane Harrison and Dr. Cornford. But Patmore was much more than a student of ancient religions; his imagination recreated the old divinities, and therefore his influence upon the more passive mind of Thompson was exactly indicated by the latter when he wrote to his friend that he needed only to be told where to look, and the practised fixity of his gaze would reveal to him what he wanted. But what he wanted was not the same as the Patmorean Eros. Thompson seems to carry the Christian idea of love a step farther, which is a logical advance on the past; but Patmore seems to have tried a new path. In his prose as well as his poetry, Thompson is devoted to the new and more energetic life; but the holiness which provides the

contact with divine power, while being far from Patmore's Eros, is not a divorce from earth; it is a Christianized version of the old Mysteries, like the Adonis Mysteries in Alexandria for which Theocritus and Bion wrote. The audience attending these could have appreciated many things in poetry like the 'Ode to the Setting Sun'. For Thompson the delight of the All-Fellowship which he sang in his last poem, the birth of which he traces in the 'After Strain' of the 'Ode to the Setting Sun', is the inheritance of every man, and it is obtained by an individualization of the Christ experience in the heart.

## CHAPTER VI

C R A S H A W

---

*'The mark of spiritual knowledge is that it has no connection with learning. In fact the spirit of man cannot learn. In his spirit a man knows all that can be known spiritually as natural.'*—  
T. A. BOWHAY.

REASONS for comparing Thompson with Crashaw are not far to seek; with no other poet is the affinity clearer. Superficial facts of their biographies coincide occasionally as well as their poetic temperaments. It is convenient to regard Crashaw as the last English Roman Catholic poet until Thompson arrived to make his faith lyrical with a like ardent beauty. Vaughan and Traherne as religious singers are not to be ignored in any generalization, but they are, though closer than Herbert to these poets, not of the same kind in spite of their mystical vision. Herbert, the least imaginative, is related to Thompson only indirectly, by his influence on contemporaries like Crashaw. His work encouraged a sweet and familiar humility, and also the indulgence in merely fanciful conceits (the vice of the 'metaphysical' poets) at the expense of the profounder poetry whose expression is essentially imaginative. Certain resemblances have indeed been remarked between some of Herbert's conceits and Thompson's ideas and images. For instance,

Its keys are at the cincture hung of God.

which occurs in a passage quite unlike Herbert, typical rather of the 'same "high astounding terms", the same vast imagery; the same *amour de l'impossible*' which reminded Mr. J. L. Garvin of Marlowe, has

nevertheless been set by commentators beside these lines, which contain the conceit-loving Herbert at his most fervent:

Only thy grace, which with these elements comes,  
 Knoweth the ready way,  
 And hath the privie key  
 Op'ning the soul's most subtile rooms;  
 While those to spirits refin'd, at doore attend  
 Despatches from their friend. . . .

An attempt, interesting but not successful, has also been made to see more than accidental and inessential resemblances between parts of 'The Hound of Heaven' and Herbert's 'The Pulley'. The comparison can at no point be pressed home. God, in the latter, after pouring blessings over Man, finds at the bottom of the glass 'Rest', whereat He pauses.

For if I should (said He)  
 Bestow this jewel also on my creature,  
 He would adore my gifts instead of Me;  
 And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:  
 So both should loser be.

Yet let him keep the rest,  
 But keep them with repining restlessness:  
 Let him be rich and weary; that, at least,  
 If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
 May toss him to my breast.

When the leading ideas here have been so forcibly expressed by greater poets and mystics, these lines do not impress one as akin to the terror and glory of 'The Hound of Heaven'. The same verdict has to be passed on comparisons between the Thompson Ode and Vaughan's 'Retirement' and 'Pursuit'. Vaughan does come near to Thompson at times in spirit, but not where one would look for superficial

similarities of image. Vaughan is a Thompson *manqué*. Compare these stanzas in 'Cockcrowling' with the argument of the 'Hound':

Only this veil which Thou hast broke,  
And must be broken yet in me,  
This veil, I say, is all the cloak,  
And cloud which shadows Thee from me.  
This veil Thy full-eyed love denies,  
And only gleams and fractions spies.

O take it off! make no delay;  
And brush me with Thy light, that I  
May shine unto a perfect day,  
And warm me at Thy glorious Eye!  
O take it off! or till it flee,  
Though with no lily, stay with me!

This is the song of the illuminated climber; Thompson's is rather that of the lost angel. But in it is a complaint which in the later poet's 'Dread of Height' is more passionately voiced.

In Crashaw is to be found the most convincing anticipation of Thompson. And after the references to Herbert, the following lines from 'Counsel', a poem which follows 'Prayer' (an address to a young lady to whom the poet had given a prayer-book), reveal something more than superficial parallelism:

Let not my Lord, the mighty Lover  
Of souls, disdain that I discover  
The hidden art  
Of His high stratagem to win your heart:  
It was His heavenly art  
Kindly to cross you  
In your mistaken love;  
That at the next remove  
Thence, He might toss you  
And strike your troubled heart

Home to Himself, to hide it in His breast  
 The bright ambrosial nest  
 Of Love, of life and everlasting rest.  
 Happy mistake!

Thus only through Crashaw is any relation with Herbert to be traced. A poem such as *Scala Jacobi Portaque Eburnea* ('Love in Dian's Lap': V), with a richness of diction quite unlike Herbert, has yet a daintiness shared between Herbert and Crashaw; but the 'angels, wet-eyed, tristful' are descended only from Crashaw, while the sophisticated clarity of the vision of the ladder going up to great Heaven's gate, and the cherubic faces looking down, owes something to the pre-Raphaelite influence. Without pursuing this side-issue, the point ought to be noted, for it is a monitory sign of the complexity of content in Thompson's work, a complexity which forbids anything like finality of generalization regarding poetic sources and influences. If these chapters seem to lay stress on one particular influence at a time, no more than a sorting out of elements need be assumed.

When the fact is noted that Crashaw was an outstanding Roman Catholic singer, it must not be forgotten that he did not break away definitely from Protestantism until late in his poetic career; nevertheless, like other seventeenth-century poets of England, he is irresistibly attracted to the symbolism and the ritual ('poetry addressed to the eye', in Thompson's words) of the Roman Catholic Church. Certainly Thompson was not more of a Catholic than the poet of 'The Weeper', 'The Nativity', and the Hymns to St. Teresa. The gentle Crashaw, moreover, was as spiritually opposed to his strong-charactered, unpoetic, 'Protestant of Protestants' father as

Francis was to the generous, unpoetic and firmly principled Preston physician who never knew till it was too late the ambitions and genius of his son. Crashaw was, after his ejection from Cambridge, not only 'lost' to his friends, as the editor of his 'Steps to the Temple' wrote, but he was found in Paris soon afterwards by Cowley 'in great poverty'. He was an outcast of the world, not so desperate a waif as Thompson, but nevertheless only saved at last by the sheltering power of a friendly Cardinal in Italy.

It is reasonably certain that Thompson knew Grosart's edition of Crashaw, in which the editor quotes Cowley's eloquent ode on the poet's death. His early sympathy with Cowley would have been strengthened by that ode, which contains the line used as a preface for his own 'Assumpta Maria':

Thou need'st not make new songs, but say the old.

And he would instinctively have responded to Cowley's eulogy:

Thy spotless Muse, like Mary, did contain  
The boundless Godhead; she did well disdain  
That her eternal verse employ'd should be  
On a less subject than eternity;  
And for a sacred mistress scorn'd to take  
But her whom God Himself scorn'd not His spouse to make:  
It (in a kind) her miracle did do,  
A fruitful mother was, and virgin too.

And when we read in Thompson's essay that Crashaw's was the first, almost unnoticed and unperfected appearance of English lyric poetry 'distinguished by ardent abandonment', we may conceive his pleasure in reading Grosart; who quotes Donne's famous image for Mrs. Drury:

Her pure and eloquent soul  
 Spoke in her cheeks, and so distinctly wrought,  
 That one might almost say her body thought,

and adds: 'I have much the same conception of Crashaw's thinking. It was so emotional as almost always to tremble into feeling. The thought issues forth from (in old-fashioned phrase) the heart, and its subtlety is something unearthly even to awfulness.' These words would apply to half of the poetry of Thompson; they do not apply to nearly so big a proportion of Crashaw's.

Reasons for comparing the two poets occurred to Thompson's earliest reviewers. Coventry Patmore, writing the first important article on the new poet, declared that 'Mr. Thompson, as some critic has remarked, is a "greater Crashaw"'. He has never, in the present book of verses (*viz. Poems*), done anything else approaching it; and, for the rest of his work, it has all been equalled, if not excelled, in its peculiar beauties, as well as its peculiar defects, by this new poet.' Patmore saw in *Poems* qualities which would place Thompson 'in the permanent ranks of fame with Cowley and with Crashaw'.

Thompson himself almost tells us that Crashaw was a source of inspiration. His interest in seventeenth-century poets began apparently with Donne and Cowley, when he was still a neophyte in poetry. Then Coleridge, an object of early admiration, appears to have led him to Crashaw. His essay on Crashaw begins significantly:

'Modern poets have singled out Crashaw as a man of genius and a source of inspiration. Coleridge declared that Crashaw's *Hymn to St. Teresa* was present to his mind while he was writing the second



part of *Christabel*; "if, indeed, by some subtle process of the mind, it did not suggest the first thought of the whole poem".

Thompson has much closer affinities than this unexpected one of Coleridge's with Crashaw.

It is hardly necessary to prove by chapter and verse that Crashaw and Thompson found in the Virgin Mother and Queen of Heaven a compelling theme of their poetry. The couplet in 'The Weeper':

O wit of Love! that thus could place  
Fountains and garden in one face,

reads now like a prophetic commentary on the later poet's 'Mistress of Vision', the 'lady of fair weeping'.

Thompson quotes only a few of the lines in Crashaw which at once throw the reader's mind forward to his own poetry, for in the small compass allowed him by journalistic requirements he is concerned to quote only brightest jewels. He quotes a stanza from 'The Nativity', the final couplet of which has an intimate delicacy of which he also is capable:

It was Thy day, Sweet! and did rise,  
Not from the East, but from Thine eyes.

And again from 'The Weeper' two stanzas which breathe the very atmosphere of 'The Mistress of Vision':

The dew no more will weep  
The primrose's pale cheek to deck:  
The dew no more will sleep  
Nuzzled in the Lily's neck;  
Much rather would it be thy tear,  
And leave them both to tremble here.

\* \* \* \* \*

C R A S H A W

Not in the Evening's eyes  
When they red with weeping are  
For the Sun that dies  
Sits Sorrow with a face so fair.  
Nowhere but here did ever meet  
Sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet.

The 'sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet' is compared by him with Browning's obvious but superficial parallel:

Its sad in sweet, its sweet in sad.

A somewhat less superficial but equally obvious parallel may be adduced:

At all the sadness in the sweet,  
The sweetness in the sad ;

'Daisy', however, is not by the Thompson who can be compared with Crashaw, though it is quite likely that the poet of 'Daisy' could be inspired by chance phrases in poems which live on a different plane, the plane of 'The Mistress of Vision'. An examination of 'The Weeper' will show that often apparent divergence conceals an emotional parallel. The 'evening's eyes' are only a kind of parhelion thrown out from Crashaw's central image of the Magdalen's eyes, and the reader of 'The Mistress of Vision' (who seems to combine in herself the two Marys) will see how the image is exuberantly enriched but emotionally similar:

In my visions fearfully  
They are ever shown to be  
As fringed pools, whereof each lies  
Pallid-dark beneath the skies. . . .

Many changes rise on  
Their phastasmal mysteries.

They grow to an horizon  
 Where earth and heaven meet;  
 And like a wing that dies on  
 The vague twilight-verges,  
 Many a sinking dream doth fleet  
 Lessening down their secrecies.  
 And, as dusk with day converges,  
 Their orbs are troublously  
 Over-gloomed and over-glowed with hope and fear of things to be.

In Thompson's verse eyes are often like phantasmal windows, or Porphyrian caves, and they enframe mysterious landscapes and hints of remote horizons. Thompson's most complete poetic expression of Love is suggested by kindred images, which are merely another form of his idea of being enveloped in a rapturous peace.

I felt the woman flow from her—  
 A calm of intempestuous storm.

I failed against the affluent tide;  
 Out of this abject earth of me  
 I was translated and enskied  
 Into the heavenly-regioned She.

All poets have favourite images which tend to become obsessions. Weeping eyes occur so much in Crashaw that the image might be described as an obsession. They are not mysterious caves like the eyes visioned by Thompson; they dissolve into running streams. Rarely can one read a few pages consecutively of 'Steps to the Temple' and 'Carmen Deo Nostro' without coming across weeping eyes, and an image which is psychologically similar, bleeding wounds. Just look at six of the first nine titles in 'Steps to the Temple':

'Sainte Mary Magdalene, or the Weeper'.

'Sancta Maria Dolorum, or the Mother of Sorrows'.  
 'The Teare'.

'Our Blessed Lord in his Circumcision to his Father'.  
 'On the Wounds of our Crucified Lord'.  
 'Upon the bleeding Crucifix: a song'.

In the last two the emphasis on the wounds is shared with streaming eyes, in those universal symbols streaming water and streaming blood. If Crashaw and not Thompson were our principal subject, such symbolism might be analysed to throw light on the poet's temperament, for it is too constant to be explainable merely by convention. 'To the Name Above Every Name: a Hymn', though not mentioned in Thompson's essay, is a remarkable example of the ardent abandonment which he says distinguishes Crashaw's poetry, form being dominated by feeling, and feeling causing the diction to cleave like gold-leaf to the thought.

In this poem the images of fructifying streams (light, blood and tears) from the crucified Christ join again with the wounds and the eyes, towards which

the thirsty Lands  
 Grasp for Thy golden showers.

And:

The attending World, to wait Thy rise  
 First turn'd to eyes;  
 And then, not knowing what to do,  
 Turn'd them to tears, and spent them too.  
 O, see so many worlds of barren years  
 Melted and measur'd out in seas of tears.  
 O, see the weary lids of wakeful Hope  
 (Love's eastern windows) all wide ope  
 With curtains drawn  
 To catch the day-break of Thy dawn.

Since Vaughan has been mentioned, the passionate Hope of Crashaw may be contrasted with the timid though beautiful creature which is Hope for the more intellectual Silurist. Hope is usually to human love what Faith is to divine love, but Crashaw's Hope, by force of her great desire, receives some of the regal rights of her sister. She is indeed at times

Queen Regent in young Love's minority.

This passionate queen has a closer affinity than the more conventional Hope with the temperament of the poet of 'The Hound of Heaven'. The fine image of 'Love's eastern windows' and the casement with drawn curtains cannot fail to send us to those 'hearted casements' of the poet whose hope is but the hare of heaven, and not the vigilant watcher.

Crashaw's intensely poetic use of metaphysical conceptions is one more link with Thompson. He frequently anticipates Blake and other later poets who must have impressed Thompson's imagination.

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!  
Eternity shut in a span!  
Summer in Winter, Day in Night!  
Heaven in Earth, and God in man!  
Great little One! Whose all-embracing birth  
Lifts Earth to Heaven, stoops Heaven to Earth.

He comes nearer to Thompson whenever his imagery and delicate feeling is peculiarly individual:

Welcome, though not to gold or silk,  
To more than Cæsar's birth night is;  
Two sister-seas of virgin-milk,  
With many a rarely-tempered kiss  
That breaths at once both maid and mother,  
Warms in the one, cools in the other.  
She sings Thy tears asleep, and dips  
Her kisses in Thy weeping eye. . . .

When poets (like Coventry Patmore) attempt to take hold of, without the divine right of temperament, such tenderly bold images, the result is a failure to convince the imagination, or even an exhibition of bad taste. But the above stanza, is it not written by a more naïve Francis Thompson? And the daring is not only in tender intimacies; Crashaw must have been as instructive to him as Shakespeare in the daring wisdom of miraculous metaphors that ransack the wide world for the reconciliation of sundered objects.

It is easy to find parallels like the following:

Hail, Most High, most humble one!  
Above the world, below Thy son;  
Whose blush the moon beateously mars,  
And stains the timorous light of stars.  
He that made all things had not done  
Till He had made Himself Thy son,

seems to be translated into more secular poetry in the *Sister Songs*:

So still the ruler by the ruled takes rule  
And wisdom weaves itself; the loom o' the fool.  
The splendent sun no splendour can display,  
Till on gross things he dash his broken ray,  
From cloud and tree and flower re-tossed in prisms spray.

Thompson can always keep pace with Crashaw's daring and nearly always with his felicity. The poet of *Sister Songs* is a brother to the poet of 'Prayer', who describes a prayer-book which he is giving to 'a young gentle-woman' as 'in one choice handful, Heaven'.

A nest of new-born sweets;  
Whose native fires disdaining  
To lie thus folded, and complaining  
Of these ignoble sheets,

Affect more comely bands  
 (Fair one) from thy kind hands;  
 And confidently look  
 To find the rest  
 Of a rich binding in your breast. |  
 It is, in one choice handful, Heaven. . . .

So familiar a theme can stir Crashaw to a revel of imagery. The prayer-book is 'Love's great artillery', and 'an armoury of light', and the precious store of divine treasures in it are

Words which are not heard with ears  
 (Those tumultuous shops of noise).

As the poet rises on the wings of inspiration he seems to enter the world of *Sister Songs*:

Effectual whispers, whose still voice  
 The soul itself more feels than hears,  
 Amorous languishments, luminous trances,  
 Sights which are not seen with eyes;  
 Spiritual and soul-piercing glances  
 Whose pure and subtil lightning flies  
 Home to the heart, and sets the house on fire,  
 And melts it down in sweet desire  
 Yet doth not stay  
 To ask the windows' leave, to pass that way,  
 Delicious deaths; soft exhalations  
 Of soul; dear and divine annihilations;  
 A thousand unknown rites  
 Of joyes and rarified delights. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

O fair, O fortunate! O rich! O dear!  
 O happy and thrice-happy she  
 Dear silver-breasted dove  
 Who ere she be  
 Whose early love  
 With winged vows

# C R A S H A W

Makes haste to meet her morning spouse  
 And close with His immortal kisses.  
 Happy indeed, who never misses  
 To improve that precious hour,  
     And every day  
     Seize her sweet prey,  
 All fresh and fragrant as He rises,  
 Dropping with a balmy shower,  
 A delicious dew of spices;  
 O let the blissful heart hold it fast  
 Her heavenly armful, she shall taste  
 At once ten thousand paradises;  
     She shall have power  
     To rifle and deflower  
 The rich and roseal spring of those rare sweets  
 Which with a swelling bosom there she meets. . . .

This has seemed remarkable enough to warrant a lengthy quotation, because it is by virtue of the spiritual tone, the diction, and the imagery, that *Sister Songs* prove the affinity of the modern poet with the poet of 'The Prayer', which runs the course of an argument by no means characteristic of Thompson:

. . . she shall discover  
     What joy, what bliss,  
 How many heavens at once it is  
 To have her God become her Lover.

So far as startling imagery is concerned, the best poems of Crashaw often reveal an imagination kindred to that of the poet who swung the earth a trinket at his wrist. In the simplest of Crashaw's hymns, the light touch of powerful pinions may unexpectedly be felt:

O little All! in Thy embrace  
 The World lies warm, and likes his place,  
 Nor does his full globe fail to be  
 Kist on both his cheeks by Thee.



The emotional conflict noticeable in this particular imagery is connected with certain essential differences between the poets; differences which concern the individual soul and therefore such as must exist between the closest of poetic kith and kin. Crashaw's adoration of the Divine Child receives an emotional reinforcement from the instinctive fatherhood of the poet. In the foregoing stanza the parental fondness really predominates, so that although the imagery is ostensibly a picture—and a most exquisite picture—of the world held in the protecting love of its Saviour, nearly all the emotional emphasis is on the idea of the darling infant cuddling its beloved toy. In all his references to children Thompson never has this familiar parental warmth of feeling. He is too sharply aware of his own childish, homeless, love-hungry feeling. Hence he goes much farther than Crashaw in poetic worship of the heavenly Queen and Mother, to the almost complete exclusion of the child Saviour and of the man-God. Christ is never a familiar companion to him, but a feared Saviour. When Thompson is spoken of as a natural Roman Catholic, and by temperament a singer of the Church's faith, this exclusiveness of his ought to be more recognized than it usually is. Nevertheless this emotional concentration of Thompson is a necessary condition of his greatness as a religious poet, in the narrower sense of the term, in which sense he is supreme in English poetry.

The subtle differences between Crashaw and Thompson can be made a little clearer if we ask why, with so many resemblances, the similarity of the two poets is not evident in Crashaw's most famous religious poems, the Hymns to St. Teresa, especially the 'Burn-

ing Heart'. It is not enough explanation of the un-Thompsonian mood to recall that the first of the hymns, like many of the other religious poems, was written when Crashaw was still a Protestant. The difference belongs, not to the poetic art, nor to the theology, but to the personalities of the poets. Francis Thompson could not have sung in such accents to St. Teresa because his ideal did not include so much of the fiery, active lover; his divine woman is more maternal, passive and reposeful, and his approach to her is more childlike. When the emotional emphasis in Crashaw's religious poems is not thrown upon the crucifixion of Christ, it is shared between Saint Mary and her holy babe. The yielding tenderness of his soul is readily dominated by the passion of Teresa; he is the man submitting to the superior beauty he perceives in womanhood; but he is feminine in identifying himself with Teresa's self-abandonment. The end of Crashaw's 'In the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady' should be compared (and contrasted) with 'In Her Paths' and other of the 'Love in Dian's Lap' series, where the human Lady of Thompson receives a worship as devout as that accorded by Crashaw to the divine Mary. The reason is that Crashaw's Blessed Lady was human; Thompson's is strictly a divinity. 'The After Woman' alone, however, is sufficient to show the intellectual superiority of Thompson, whose vision is philosophically synthesized.

The remark has been made that Crashaw's child Jesus is a very human baby, and not quite convincingly seraphic. But the childlike directness and exquisite familiarity of Crashaw is never equalled by the later poet, who could not have written like this:

No, no! your King's not yet to seek  
 Where to repose His royal head,  
 See, see, how soon His new-bloom'd cheek  
 'Twixt's mother's breasts is gone to bed,  
 Sweet choice, said we! no way but so  
 Not to lie cold, yet sleep in snow.

If Thompson could have added that to his ornate splendours, what a poet we should have had! He wrote ('Form and Formalism'): 'Many think in the head; but it is the thinking in the heart that is most wanted.' Crashaw did not bother to make that explicit, but in the words of his successor, 'he gives to truth his own flesh'. This is wonderfully true of both poets, but the one who enunciated principles in prose had not the other's wise naïvety in poetry; he was tinged with the pale cast of thought, and bore scars from blows that perhaps the other could not have sustained. Noteworthy also is the fact that Crashaw's secular poetry is as good as his 'sacred' poetry, and includes 'Music's Duel', which is generally acknowledged to be his greatest achievement. Thompson reaches the highest levels generally in his religious and mystical poetry, and nearly all those poems, even 'Daisy' and 'The Poppy', which may be regarded as 'secular' for the purpose of this argument, cannot be included among his finest achievements. The only possible exceptions are 'Love Declared' and the 'Arab Love Song'. But these exceptions are explainable as due to the theme, which is the passion and absorbing power of love.

## CHAPTER VII

S H E L L E Y

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*'Beauty is merely the spiritual making itself known sensuously.'*—HEGEL.

*'The artist for ever seeking new things is like a man seeking for a cool place on his pillow. Let him lay his head on the cool place and it ceases to be cool. . . . God is the only coolness that keeps fresh.'*—JEAN COCTEAU.

NOT a little of the resemblance between Thompson and Crashaw springs from the common source of their religious feeling and the rich symbolism of their faith. There is also the temperamental contact, without which their poetry would never have shone with the same tender light; but their peculiarly poetic faith remains an important factor; it is more than the expression of individual temperament. When we see in Thompson's poetry the very spirit of Crashaw's, we must therefore recognize the approach of these poets to one another as less remarkable, or at least more easily explained, than the pervasive affinities between Shelley and Thompson. It is not merely that Shelley and Thompson are both greater poets than Crashaw, and therefore intersect on a wider arc. If Crashaw and Thompson are singers at times in the same choir, Shelley and Thompson are brothers at all times in the life of song.

In the famous Shelley essay Thompson tells us that 'Crashaw was a Shelley *manqué*'. Shelley, in other words, was a part of Thompson that Crashaw lacked. Crashaw 'never reached the Promised Land, but he had fervid visions of it. The Metaphysical School, like Shelley, loved imagery for its own sake.' Whatever he means by that 'Promised Land', pre-

sumably it nourished rich harvests of imagery. But the 'Metaphysical School' was an 'abortive movement'; 'that school was a certain kind of poetry trying for a range. Shelley is the range found.'

Thompson's criticism is not always content with such borrowed small-change as schools and movements, and the doubtful use of them here is one of several faults in an essay which has been eulogized without discrimination. Moreover, he does not quite hit the nail on the head in saying that Shelley 'loved imagery for its own sake'; and he is on uncertain ground in describing Crashaw as 'the highest product of the Metaphysical School'; but he tells us, between the lines, that he himself was much inclined to let the imagery start and tremble under his feet while pursuing a devious course through a theme. And constantly he betrays an awareness that he is looking at himself in looking at Shelley.

The brother poet of Shelley is he who described himself in describing the other as one whose soul had been 'encysted' in childhood; as one who had never been a boy, and therefore remained childlike when his play had changed to 'such as manhood stops to watch'. It is no accident that he 'burst into prose poetry' at this point, with those perfect metaphors:

'He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amidst the stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He teases into growling the kennelled thunder. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven: its floor is littered with his broken fancies. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world. He gets between the feet



FRANCIS THOMPSON, ABOUT 19

of the horses of the sun. He stands in the lap of patient Nature, and twines her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions, to see how she will look nicest in his song.'

This is the mythological poet, whose 'childlike quality assimilated him to the childlike peoples among whom mythologies have their rise', whose imagination gathers materials for 'visionary Edens'; the poet who 'for astounding figurative opulence yields only to Shakespeare, and even to Shakespeare not in absolute fecundity but in range of images'.

The comparison with Shakespeare is somewhat extravagant, but it indicates once more the imaginative life which was native to the later poet as to his subject. If by 'absolute fecundity' he means imagery which blossoms out of imagery, and bears the seeds of still more images, the comparison to Shakespeare will not survive scrutiny. It is just in 'absolute fecundity' that Shakespeare is most surely supreme. The study of the Shakespearean diction has shown how the wide range of images can be packed with more riches by the beautiful flexibility of words. A poet's range of imagery, indeed, is not entirely measurable by the number and variety of images in the verse. 'How express and admirable' says Hamlet 'in form and moving' is this 'piece of work', a man. 'Express and admirable' applied to 'form and moving' make an image which the poet of *Paradise Lost* might have sighed to capture. This mastery of language, this incarnation of the thought in words, is the poetic precipitation of concrete beauty out of the nebulous potentiality of dream. The dreaming mind supplies images with a latent power; their possibilities await

the creative condensation; the much in little. Thompson once wrote to a friend that he preferred making his images 'turn both ways'; he realized and strove towards the Shakespearean fecundity. Of the language of his Shelley essay, he wrote that 'it seethed with imagery', 'like my poetry', and probably applied to it that distinction he had already recognized between fecundity and range of imagery. The images in the essay, for instance, have a fine delicacy and reach, but except in the one moment where he speaks of the 'immortal clarities', his language is barely more than pseudo- or prose-poetry, because it is not fecund in a high degree. The originally evocative quality of poetry is the product of the dreaming mind; and when we say that both Shelley and Thompson wrote much beautiful poetry of Nature, it would be just as true to say that they wrote much poetry of dream, for Nature is to them a store of symbolic images. The Shakespearean fecundity of image is Thompson's at least as much as Shelley's; one is tempted to say that he is nearer than Shelley to Shakespeare, because in his best work the image is more dramatic as well as fecund, and displays the underlying thought more startlingly. The enormous claim which he makes for Shelley's imagery follows close upon the rating of his nature poetry as 'perhaps less profound than Wordsworth's', a statement due, as an examination of his criticism reveals, to a failure to realize Shelley's scheme of thought. He loads with beautiful praise the 'amazing lyric world, where immortal clarities sigh past', but only at one moment appreciates the powerful splendour of vision in the poet whose Atheism and Pantheism, compared with the symmetry of a traditional faith, seem such unshapely forms to cover with so rich a



raiment. He does, however, make an unpremeditated obeisance to the seership of the infidel; his delicate apprehension of Shelley's intuitions 'of the underlying analogies, the secret subterranean passages, between matter and soul' forces from him praise, or rather sets him at liberty to offer a eulogy which disposes of the suggestion that the essential Shelley was merely the marvellous child playing truant.

A close examination of all that Thompson wrote about Shelley soon discovers his difficulty in maintaining a critical attitude. He nowhere shows much appreciation of Shelley's philosophical guides, chief of whom were Plato and Spinoza, and in any case he writes self-consciously, as a Catholic to Catholics. Nevertheless, he is so sympathetic to Shelley that we may be sure it was the difference of faith which made him suggest that the poet of the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Prometheus Unbound' was a less profound poet of Nature than Wordsworth, for his mind has little in common with Wordsworth's, while it has nearly everything in common with Shelley's. Notice how he defends Shelley, who 'committed grave sins, and one cruel crime; but we remember also that he was an atheist from his boyhood'. And 'we decline to judge so unhappy a being by the rules which we should apply to a Catholic'; and Shelley 'was struggling—blindly, weakly, stumblingly, but still struggling—towards higher things'.

After allowing for the particular conditions under which the essay was composed (he hoped it would open the *Dublin Review*, a very conservative Catholic journal, to him), and that he was really making a courageous attack on the Philistines, one still notices a blind spot. He does, it is true, refuse to believe that 'any Christian

ever had his faith shaken through reading Shelley'; but this is a portion of his persuasive appeal to people who are prevented by mere words from crediting Shelley with an ardent faith and a comprehensive vision of reality. The reader feels that the poet of the 'Mistress of Vision' does not go far enough when he acknowledges that 'Shelley's aims were generous'. He does not reveal an adequate appreciation of the visionary power of that mind which in a few years changed from a jejune disciple of Godwin into a profound poet of the 'spirit's plastic stress'; who was essentially the worshipper of a Beauty akin to that Love which for Thompson was the 'Hound of Heaven'. Indeed, the very image seems to be Shelley's, for his 'winged hound of heaven' in 'Prometheus' is the nearest model of Thompson's in English poetry, while the idea is almost anticipated in the 'awful power' invoked in the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty'. In this important and remarkable hiatus Thompson proves himself less aware of the seership of Shelley than the pagan Swinburne. And yet, should he not have understood this too? Might not the prose have told him what the poetry failed in proving? Is not the 'Defence of Poetry', with only the introduction of a term used in a peculiar way, that is, Imagination, an exegesis of all the poetry that lauds 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge'? Should not Browning's

Sun-treader, life and light be thine forever

have more deeply impressed him?

Such questioning is reasonable, and not irrelevant, because involved in it is the completeness of the Roman Catholic poet's faith. To speak colloquially, he knew

as a poet when he was on a good thing, and there is little doubt that his greatness as a poet is inseparable from his mystical faith; and he had no intellectual doubts to distract him.

So far only the essay in the *Collected Works* has been considered. Thompson pursues the subject of Shelley's personality in a further study, written, Mr. Wilfrid Meynell says, after the completion of the well-known essay.<sup>1</sup> First Thompson attempts to vindicate Shelley's character (presumably from his own earlier aspersions). Somebody's suggestion that Shelley himself was a wretch but wrote like an angel, he vigorously rebuts as 'the most Tartarian lie which ever spouted on paper from the pen of a good man', and then, waxing bolder as he finds a way to defend Shelley, he declares: 'I have fancied, at times, a degree of analogy between the wandering sheep Shelley and the Beloved Disciple. Both are usually represented with a certain feminine beauty. Both made the constant burden of their teaching: "My little children, love one another."' Both have similarities in the cast of their genius. The Son of Man walks amidst the golden candlesticks almost as the profane poet would have seen Him walk.' This is the prelude to a brief but richly figurative passage, in which he at last perceives the 'large elemental vision' of Shelley, but also makes an assertion which is astonishing as coming from a mystical poet: 'The poetical greatness of a Biblical book has no necessary commensuration with its religious importance; Job is greater than Isaiah.'

<sup>1</sup> Some extra passages appear in the 'Notes' at the end of Vol. III of the *Collected Works*, but most of the quoted matter which follows here is taken from *Merry England*, Vol. XIX, the only place in which the complete additional 'Further Thoughts' have been printed.

Is Thompson not confusing theology with religion? The subject bristles with difficulties; but whether *Isaiah* is or is not of greater 'religious importance' than Job, it is clear now that the obstruction in Thompson's critical outlook is some kind of confusion of values. No one knew better than Thompson when he was writing poetry that imaginative synthesis has a religious import. But he would not have assented to an equally true proposition, that the importance of poetic vision to religion—importance which made the poet, in Shelley's words, a 'legislator of the world', that is, of human actions—is not measurable by the poet's theology, any more than the importance of poetic intuitions can be measured by the poet's theories. In art, as in religion, 'ripeness is all'. The poet's theology or philosophy may adversely affect his potential value as a poet; but this is a very different thing from taking the accomplished fact of his poetry and applying a prejudiced eye to its power.

With such a point of view, Thompson may be considered to have treated Shelley very handsomely; and it is not surprising that his startling tribute to Shelley's seership, his 'elemental vision', should be but momentary, and quickly contradicted. In the passages in *Merry England* he speaks of the 'Shelley camp' which split into two sections when it was discovered that Shelley was not an angel, and refers to one section, which 'imitated the conduct of the one-eyed Admiral on a certain famous occasion, and continued staunchly to worship the Shelley that never was on sea or land'. This camp, 'needless to say, was of those who take to their hearts that sweetly pretty portrait evolved by a young lady of the true old "sweetly pretty" school. I mean the portrait which

Miss Curran gave to the world, with "A Present for a Good Girl" writ large across its face. A most sweet, sugar-candied Shelley as you shall see in a summer's day; entirely proper to be carried in school-girls' pockets and surreptitiously sucked during lesson time.'

While revealing Thompson's desire to assert Shelley's humanity, this has only the slightest reference to that other picture of the child 'gold-dusty with tumbling among the stars'! However, his argument is very interesting as a reflection of the mind which produced the better known essay. In reference to the biographical disclosures which caused the Shelley camp to split, he says that the mere fact that there '*could*' be revelations to any discerning reader' was to him 'itself a revelation'. After this very decided admission, the reader may reasonably expect Thompson to attempt a reconciliation between Shelley's character and his poetry. In the passages quoted at the end of the Collected Works we see him defending Shelley's character with the argument that fine poetry is the product of a fine spirit; though there is a 'difference between the true poet in his poetry and in his letters or personal intercourse'; in fact, 'just the difference between two states of the one man; between the metal live from the forge and the metal chill'. This is a serious qualification of the denial that a scamp can write fine poetry, but it is not exactly a retreat. And, indeed, Thompson does not fear to make the explanation now expected of him. As the following passage is not generally known, it is quoted at some length:

'The present writer's own broad wash of Shelley's character, made after his verse—that Veronica's veil

whereon he wiped his bloody brows<sup>1</sup>—has never received from these “revelations” anything beyond detail and sharpening. I can only conclude that even among genuine lovers of poetry, most are ignorant of the allowances necessary to be made in spelling backwards a poet’s character from his work. It is (but no analogies I may advance can be exactly exact) like painting a vivid sunset, whose scheme of hues dipped in air and fire must be transposed into the opaque hues of earth. The poetry is the poet, true; but the poet how? In his hours of what, for lack of a better term, we call inspiration. (It is a pretentious term which I do not like, but I must needs use it.) Now, inspiration cannot alter a poet’s character, cannot give him an equality which it did not find in him; but it can and does alter the aspect of his qualities, affect them in degree though not in kind. It sublimates and it concentrates. It sublimates, as light sublimates translucent colour, steeping the sere leaf in a luminous syrup of citron, and with fair saturation consecrating its very stains and dishonours into loveliness. So, too, permeated by inspiration, the soberer harmonies of the poet’s quiescent spirit kindle with tinges more rarified; so, too, the poet’s very faults may by inspiration become subtilized into beauty, because there is revealed that soul of goodness which is often in evil, when the evil springs from weakness rather than viciousness. But infiltrated with light or unlit, with inspiration or uninspired, it is the same leaf and the same spirit. And inspiration concentrates. Hence what is a power in the poet’s writings may present itself as a frequent

<sup>1</sup> ‘I hope no too literalizing reader will, by pursuing the figure into vigorous detail where I meant by imagery, evolve never-meant blasphemy’ (Thompson’s footnote).

weakness in his familiar intercourse. For when we scrutinize under the microscope a tenuous film of blood, we expect to see blood's accustomed splendid sanguine; and we find instead a fluid of all but imperceptible strawey tint, in which float minute discs of palest buff colour.'

Such considerations must 'be recollected by him who would gauge a singer from songs, or the admirer will probably be disappointed'. The critic, probably feeling that he is not clearing the hurdles very neatly which he has himself set up, makes a bold dash into the assertion: 'That in the poet's verse allures which in his intercourse may repel; that in the one is power, which may in the other become weakness';<sup>1</sup> and instances the 'frailly delicate' quality in Shelley's poetry to illustrate his argument, seemingly blind to the fact which ought to have stared at the author of *Sister Songs*, that Shelley's delicacy of perception is strength, is strength of intellect and of soul stronger than the strength demanded to create the magnificent extravagances of a Tamurlaine, or the fairly simple adaptation of new and old ideas in a Wordsworthian vision of reality.

In the passage quoted above, Thompson for once uses his figurative style to cover confusion instead of to elucidate subtlety of thought. His second footnote shows how uneasy he feels in the logical position left

<sup>1</sup> 'Shelley's deeper moral evil betrays itself in his poems as evil. In those mermaid-peopled waters there is the occasional protrusion of an ugly tentacle from some unsuspected crevice. Very occasional; but sufficient to have shown his readers that search would surely disclose the unpleasant lurking thing. For over those waters was never raised the hand that was raised over "deep Galilee"' (Thompson's note).

by his various arguments. The trouble started with his assumption of Shelley's moral inferiority. If he had forgotten certain dogmas and remembered for the time being only æsthetic values, he would not have thought that Shelley's character required such a laborious defence, nor would he have been caught on the two-horned dilemma, first, that a wretch could not write fine poetry, and then that as he was certainly not all he should have been, his poetry was not always fine. The difficulty touched upon so disconcertingly by Thompson is part of the problem we have yet to examine, of the relation between poetry and life. The link may be religion. Shelley's weakness was not a weakness of character; that is to say, however imperfect Shelley's character was it will compare very well with that of the majority of men, and even of poets—even with Thompson's. His weakness was due to the dissipating effect of his struggles to co-ordinate his desires, and for a poet the only satisfactory solution of such a struggle is faith. Shelley possessed the temperament of the mystic, but the effect of his youthful experiences, as Thompson realized clearly enough, was to set up unnecessary conflicts. By associating faith with oppression and reactionary politics, Shelley drove himself far afield into philosophy to discover the faith that was the prime motive of his poetry.

How close to Shelley is Thompson when the poetry they gave us is considered! Who can fail to see in the luminous symbolism of Shelley's sun, light, fire, rivers and caves, mountains and fountains, veils and perfumes, the garden and its visionary Lady, Birth and Death and Change and Eternity, recondite hints which reappear in Thompson's heights and depths,



Orient and Occident, the two Marys, Creation and the Cross, the Bridegroom and the Bride, the Tabernacle of the Sun, and the Monstrance of the poet's adoration? Certainly Thompson must have known that a pulse of the inner heart beats in rhythmic antiphonies between 'Prometheus Unbound', 'The Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', 'The Witch of Atlas', 'The Triumph of Life', the 'Hymn of Apollo', 'Alastor', the 'Ode to the West Wind', 'Epipsychidion' and his own orchestral harmonies in the *Sister Songs*, the 'Hound of Heaven', the 'Anthem of Earth', 'Corymbus for Autumn', 'Ode to the Setting Sun' and 'Orient Ode', and 'The Mistress of Vision'. Does not the mere enumeration of such poems seem to bring into splendid conjunction two marvellous galaxies in the same universe?

The differences are obvious, but less essential than the profound similarities. Shelley would not have called spring a Pentecostal miracle, but he knew it was a miracle. He did not identify the Sun with Christ, but he sang to it as a divine creator, and it is, with fire, supreme among material symbols in his verse, as in Thompson's. Shelley discovered that the world was 'a painted veil', and when we consider his vision of the 'Triumph of Life' it is easy to put him in relation to the poet of 'An Anthem of Earth':

In a little thought, in a little thought,  
We stand and eye thee in a grave dismay,  
With sad and doubtful questioning, when first  
Thou speak'st to us as men: like sons who hear  
Newly their mother's history, unthought  
Before, and say—'She is not as we dreamed:  
Ah me! we are beguiled.'

though Shelley certainly would not have written:

It is long  
 Since Time was first a fledgeling;  
 Yet thou may'st be but a pendant bulla  
 Against his stripling bosom swung.

Both the concrete, ecclesiastical image and the colossal immensity are outside Shelley's range. So also is the tremendous cumulative force of this anthem, though such cumulative force is exceedingly rare even with Thompson.

The store of imagery used by these poets is drawn largely from non-human Nature, in Shelley's poetry almost entirely so. The poetry of Nature is the very stuff of the visionary Edens which their spirits haunt; but those Edens, veiled in filmy translucencies, contoured by dreams, situate in the zenith of enrondured thought, fabricated by the same magic of the passionate heart, contain not the same sanctities nor require the same toll for entrance. Worship is the key to Thompson's; the universe is the garden of God, the wheeling planets set up a nine-fold wall of magic singing about it, and the golden smoke of adoration fumes from the censer swung by the Mistress of Vision. The solar system is a cathedral receiving the potency of the sun, who is worshipped with antiphonal hymns of birth and death; and the sun is but an image of the spiritual Son and Bridegroom; the Cathedral of Nature is an image of the Christian Church, and the Church is the Bridal soul. The key to Shelley's Eden is Freedom. The Eden is much less easily comprehended, being an uncompleted fabric. It may be likened to a glittering night of stars beyond the moth-like souls of men; from it an effluent spirit presses upon the mortal world; eternal ideas of Beauty and Love are felt as a plastic

stress in the phenomenal universe. Men are temporal and incidental; the ever-living forms or Ideas constitute a landscape through which life streams like a river, the bubbles of mortality bursting on its ever-changing surface. His Eternity of the Spirit lacks the circulating vitality of the true Paradise, which must be hospitable to the individual soul, the price of entrance once paid. But the price is pain. Eternity without immortality is Shelley's refuge from that Medusa of the human heart, the purgation of suffering. He paid the price by ineffectual instalments, so that his song, like Thompson's, was 'fresh with dewy pain', although it found no haven. His light-outsPEEDING intuition revealed to him the unity embracing diversity, the white light of eternity which pours upon the prismatic dome of time ; but the mystical implications of such a vision he could not harbour in his unpeaceful heart. Fear wist to evade better than Love wist to pursue. He believed in the perfectibility of Man, but his belief was partly self-assertion. If poets are teachers, his peer in poetry is a profounder teacher than he himself had become when he wrote 'The Triumph of Life'. But he did not finish writing it.

The reality embodied by the imagination of the two poets is fundamentally the same, though the place of pain in the scheme of life is accepted by the one and generally contested by the other. The source of Shelley's inspiration for the 'Prometheus Unbound', however, shows that he was finding out the necessity of sacrifice in his scheme of regeneration for the world. Such differences of content in the work of these poets are all traceable to the fact that one possessed a firm and consistent faith and the other was a seeker. Thompson's theological elaboration of eternal ideas,

which we may call poetic or religious according to the emotional emphasis of their employment, provides the one important distinction between him and Shelley. It is rather more than superficial distinction, because Shelley, the child who makes a glorious nursery of the sky, is a wandering spirit restless as his Lady of Atlas, while Thompson is at home with the Mistress of Vision, who is both the sybil and the divine, reposeful Mother. She does not laugh to hear the fire-balls roar as she outspeeds them; 'her eyes a little tremble in the wind of her own sighs'. She is calm, with the terrible peace of infinite Pain infinitely vanquished; and the poet has learnt that he cannot pass the gates of Luthany, nor tread the region Elenore, until he has done more than discover how all things linked are. His song must be 'shield and mirror to the fair snake-curléd Pain', and when he has attained his Persean conquest he will find himself already in Elenore. The snake is wisdom; Shelley knew, but he did not face the completed meaning of 'the knowledge of good and evil', and the last word remains Thompson's. Most of Shelley's poetry is a glorious fable of the adventures of Perseus before the conquest of the Medusa. Perseus' flying boat becomes, under his Lady's creative hands, more marvellous than anything in Greek poetry, more marvellous than anything of its kind in English poetry, and it is instructive to observe how the Hermaphrodite, who is compounded of fire and snow, steers it for the divine delight of his creator. The new Bellerophon fights the Chimeraë by countering the 'monstrous twins', Truth and Error, with the freedom of creative imagination. But the Medusa of the human heart, purgative pain, is not yet overcome.

Shelley stops short of the mystical truth that Perfec-

tion is compounded of Joy and Pain, and that Love, like pleasure, cannot possibly be won by pursuit, since it is the Pursuer. It would never have occurred to him to assert:

O nothing, in this corporal earth of Man,  
That to the imminent heaven of his high soul  
Responds with colour and with shadow, can  
Lack correlated greatness,

because his vision did not include the much-in-little, God-in-the-heart. He saw a bright form and pursued it, now as Beauty, now as Love, and did not know that it was shadowed forth from an inner brightness imprisoned and awaiting the collapse of the walls of the self. We remember the lament for the rare 'Spirit of Delight' and find Thompson's understanding deeper. In 'By Reason of Thy Law', for instance:

. . . he who kens to meet Pain's kisses fierce  
Which hiss against his tears,  
Dread, loss, nor love frustrate,  
Nor all iniquity of the froward years  
Shall his inured wing make idly bate,  
Nor of the appointed quarry his staunch sight  
To lose observance quite;  
Seal from half-sad and all-clate  
Sagacious eyes  
Ultimate Paradise;  
Nor shake his certitude of haughty fate . . .

Did I not know,  
That ill is statured to its opposite;  
Did I not know,  
And even of sadness so,  
Of utter sadness, make  
Of extreme sad a rod to mete  
The incredible excess of unsensed sweet,  
And mystic wall of strange felicity.

Here is not merely a more affirmative mood than that which produces such 'virgin-gold of poetry' as the 'Song to a Skylark' and 'Rarely, rarely comest Thou', but also a profounder knowledge. Shelley died before he understood himself. This is why he wanders through his half-Hellenic Paradise, not aware that he has reached home, entering crystal secrecies and sibylline caves without knowing that his eternity is here, not realizing that he is being gathered to the bosom of the mistress he pursues with fluttering heart and flying hem.

Nevertheless, Shelley is a superb proof of Thompson's familiar theme that 'on the wings of Christianity came the great truth that Love is of the soul', and that to the Christian poets, 'to Dante and the followers of Dante we owe the full development of its truth'. He was too faithful a follower of Plato and Dante not to make Love and Beauty inseparable ideas, if not interchangeable terms. He is the poetic witness of the truth of Thompson's principle that 'the function of natural love is to create a craving which it cannot satisfy'. From Dante onwards this has been a creed of poets. Quite recently we have Mr. W. B. Yeats telling us: 'We require a new statement of moral doctrine, which shall be accepted by the average man, but be at the same time beyond his power in practice. Classical morality in its decay became an instrument in the hands of commonplace energy to overthrow distinguished men. A true system of morals is from the first a weapon in the hands of the most distinguished.' What Mr. Yeats is asking for is just what the poets are always supplying; only the word 'poetic' needs to be understood as qualifying 'statement of moral doctrine'. Shelley is essentially a poet of

Christian love, although he had not grasped the mystical function of an unattainable ideal. The Witch of Atlas, who is the spirit of Poetry, has the very eyes of Love:

She all those human figures breathing there  
Beheld as living spirits—to her eyes  
The naked beauty of the soul lay bare,  
And often through a rude and worn disguise  
She saw the inner form most bright and fair—

and she has the power of Love:

And then—she had a charm of strange device,  
Which murmured on mute lips with tender tone,  
Could make that spirit mingle with her own.

And sometimes to those streams of upper air,  
Which whirl the earth in its diurnal round,  
She would ascend, and win the spirits there  
To let her join the chorus.

In the 'Defence of Poetry' there is a reconciliation of the 'naked beauty of the soul' with that of the naked truth, which Poetry discovers by stripping the universe of its veils of the familiar and accustomed. Poetry is a vehicle of transcendental knowledge; Thompson himself, inferior in employing reason, is less conclusive than Shelley, who thus delimits its function: 'Reason is to the imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.' If the poet of 'The Mistress of Vision' when he said the poem was transcendental rather than mystical, meant that it came from a greater unrestraint, a less responsible play of his imagination than poetry like 'The Hound of Heaven', which is purely the expression of mystical experience, he could have been reassured by Shelley

of its grasp on reality: poets are 'the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with the beautiful and the true, that partial apprehension of the agencies of the invisible world which is called religion'. In other words, all beautiful poetry is in some way a revelation; or, in Thompson's words, 'Without love, no poetry can be beautiful', and Love is to both poets the life and light of truth. They both said in prose what they sang in poetry, and they both translated into verse much which they had first written in prose, because their intellectual scheming was merely ancillary to intuition.



## CHAPTER VIII

DONNE AND ST. AUGUSTINE

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*'Tu imminens dorso fugitivorum . . .'*—ST. AUGUSTINE.

DONNE is more profound than Crashaw; his poetry comes generally out of an illumination born, unlike Thompson's, of warfare between the spirit and the intellect. Donne's peculiarity, which alienated him from his own age and attracts the present one, is a combination of intellectual dissatisfaction and emotional fervour. In him energy of emotion joined forces with energy of intellect, but never with complete success, to resolve a temperamental disharmony which was more fundamental than the disharmony in Thompson, whose poetry records a conflict between his ascetic faith and a hunger for human kindness. The 'dewy pain' of Thompson's verse is the survival of a childish forlornness, and the author of 'The City of God' is nearer to him in spirit than Donne. His mystical insight gave him strength to suffer, but could not satisfy the hunger except by creating a wonderful poetry of faith. Thompson was almost incapable of cynicism or satire, and outcast from that world which Donne found so difficult to escape, he would, being so undistracted from essential things, like Wordsworth, being solitary,

recognize

A grandeur in the beating of the heart,

and in the birth of his poems, a creative function as mysterious and miraculous to him as the birth of children. All things conspired to make him a poet of mystical reality. Donne had to travel a long way to reach that recondite simplicity. He had to discover first that:

We know ourselves least; mere outward shows  
 Our minds so store  
 That our souls, no more than our eyes disclose  
 But form and colour, only he who knows  
 Himself knows more.

But Thompson always knew:

Nature is whole in her least things exprest,  
 Nor know we with what scope God builds the worm.  
 Our towns are copied fragments from our breast,  
 And all man's Babylons strive but to impart  
 The grandeur of his Babylonian heart.

Thompson gathered, from the world of sense, materials to image the reality that was to him as evident as his own existence. Donne's intellect probed the weaknesses of institutions and customs, men and manners, not so much to reform them as to reform himself. His emotional power could not be expended only on satire, and we find him evolving poetic fantasy out of philosophy, and fantasy took on a mystical coherence. Donne was essentially a poet not a philosopher, and he grew increasingly mystical in his awareness of life. He was perhaps less rational even than Thompson, and when he is witty, his wit is generally poetry. It was the marriage of wit to dream which altered the hue of his fantasy, producing a poetry which, at its best, is mystical rather than metaphysical. In 'The Ecstasy' he writes:

Our hands were firmly cemented  
 By a fast balm, which thence did spring,  
 Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread  
 Our eyes upon one double string,

which is the sort of thing that has been described as 'metaphysical poetry'. The wit employed is obvious, but it is buried, so to speak, in the glow of a dream.

The ardour of the poet has transformed the logical and metaphysical element into mystical vision. The words seem to be spoken in a husky voice trembling with passion; the soul of the poet is shining with humility before the splendour of love. Emotion lights his path to vision; it often darkened Thompson's, setting him at odds with his knowledge of the spirit. If we compare with Donne's another fine poetic conceit, where the emotional tension is less, it will be found that the mystical element has vanished. The following image, from a sonnet of Shakespeare, is sufficiently poetic—that is to say, emotional enough to convince us of its validity but it is not passionate:

Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee  
Calls back the lovely April of her prime.

Many other images, apparently more exalted than a looking-glass, might have served the poet's purpose equally well; but, having chosen this, he works it out logically, and richly decorates it. In Donne's 'Ecstasy', although there is more complexity in the conceit, it is carried off by passion into a mystical simplicity. It will not be wasting space to quote the first part of the poem:

Where, like a pillow on a bed,  
A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest  
The violet's declining head,  
Sate we, on one another's breast.

Our hands were firmly cemented  
By a fast balm which thence did spring,  
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread  
Our eyes upon one double string.

So to engraft our hands as yet  
Was all our means to make us one,  
And pictures in our eyes to get  
Was all our propagation.

As 'twixt two equal armies Fate  
 Suspends uncertain victory,  
 Our souls (which, to advance their state,  
 Were gone out) hung 'twixt her and me.

And whilst our souls negotiate there,  
 We like sepulchral statues lay;  
 All day the same our postures were,  
 And we said nothing all the day.

A characteristic of imagery employed by the mystic and by the creator of poetry such as this can be observed more easily in the perfect 'Valediction forbidding Mourning'. It is the employment of humble workaday images which, without the tension of overpowering emotional conviction, would remain merely quaint, as do indeed most such 'metaphysical' images. In Donne's own work will be found plenty of examples of merely quaint imagery, conceits which interest the mind by unexpectedness, but which do not seem to mean more than the words say, do not echo in the memory, or gather about themselves an aura of associations.

But see what Donne, on the mystical plane, can make with a pair of compasses for metaphor when he writes with fervour. Here are the last five stanzas of the 'Valediction forbidding Mourning':

But we, by a love so far refined  
 That ourselves know not what it is,  
 Inter-assurèd of the mind,  
 Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefor, which are one,  
 Though I must go, indure not yet  
 A breach, but an expansion,  
 Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so  
 As stiff twin compasses are two;  
 Thy soul the fixed foot, makes no show  
 To move, but doth if th' other do.

And though it in the centre sit,  
 Yet when th' other far doth roam,  
 It leans and hearkens after it,  
 And grows erect as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
 Like the other foot, obliquely run;  
 Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
 And makes me end where I begun.

The reflection of immensity in the comprehensive diminishing-mirror of human life is a function of Thompson's poetry, also. His imagery is not of this prosaic kind, certainly; he is closer to those Elizabethan predecessors of Donne in style than the poet who revolted against the Renaissance spirit which in poetry had turned to decadence after the passing of Shakespeare; but in essence, being mystical, the poetry of Thompson translates heaven into terms of earth, and discovers the divine in the human. He could not write such a 'Valediction' to a human companion, but he could ensky a human lady by the divine prerogative of his passionate imagination.

Donne's poetic energy turned sin as well as love into a mystical theme, transforming the deliberate wit of his images as it is transformed in the erotic verse. So he not only writes 'Divine Poems' but pours into sermons a fiery energy which occasionally makes the rumbling and sonorous prose a vehicle of poetry. On such occasions the words of the penitent poet pierce like flame the smoke of involved argument and far-fetched conceit.

From a consideration of the philosophy of imperfection he will break into a passage of eloquent illustration, which concludes, retaining the wit, with the concrete imagery and the rhythm of poetry:

'The world is a great Volume, and man the Index of that Book; Even in the body of man, you may turn to the whole world: This body is an Illustration of all Nature; God's recapitulation of all that he had said before, in his *Fiat lux*, and *Fiat firmamentum*, and in all the rest, said or done, in all the six days. Propose this body to thy consideration in the highest exaltation thereof; as it is in the *Temple of the Holy Ghost*: Nay, not in a Metaphor, or comparison of a Temple or any other similtudinary thing, but as it was really and truly the very body of God, in the person of Christ, and yet this body must wither, must decay, must languish, must perish. When *Goliath* had armed and fortified this body, And *Jezebel* had painted and perfumed this body, And *Dives* had pampered and larded this body, As God said to *Ezekiel*, when he brought him to the *dry bones*, *Fili hominis*, *Sonne of Man*, dost thou think these bones can live? They said in their hearts to all the world, Can these bodies die? And they are dead. *Jezebel's* dust is not Amber, nor *Goliath's* dust *Terra sigillita*, Medicinal; nor does the Serpent, whose meat they are both, find any better relish in *Dives' dust*, than in *Lazarus'.*'

A subject like 'Eternal Damnation' evokes all the passion and poetry in Donne, and the prose passage following, 'That God should let my soul fall out of his hand, into the bottomless pit', is lurid with sombre fantasy, intricate with inwoven conceits, loud with organ-like contrapuntal music rolling thunderously

from high to low, from low to high along the labyrinthine galleries of the soul. Thompson's prose at no time will stand comparison with such a tremendous voice. When he elaborates and deliberately colours his prose he seems to take De Quincey as his model. Nevertheless if the prevailing tone of *Moestitiæ Encomium* and *Finis Coronat Opus* is like that of De Quincey, especially of the *Suspiria*, are there not moments when a memory of the Dean of St. Paul's intrudes? Do not the first few sentences of *Moestitiæ Encomium* sound just like Donne's figurative eloquence in a sermon or one of the 'Devotions', during the preparatory calm before a peroration? But the indications of prose style do not, however keen the search, yield evidence that Thompson found in Donne's prose what he needed. So far as style is concerned a relation is more easily established by looking in Thompson's verse for certain qualities of Donne's prose. The 'Anthem of Earth' seems to have been written by a Shakespearean Donne, if such an awful monster can be conceived. We find at least the organ thunders of music and tenebral splendours of image, and even the grim dark thought of the seventeenth-century poet. The Anthem seems in its mood to reconcile the fierce impetuosity and sonorous eloquence of Donne, the unsentimental earth-worship of Goethe and Meredith, and the ultimate solution, through 'Pontifical Death', of Christian faith. It is the greatest rhapsody in English poetry.

So soon as the matter of Donne's work is considered, he is seen to be of more importance to Thompson than a poet like Crashaw, who can but offer him what he already possesses. It is not merely that Donne was aware of the poetic value of ecclesiastical symbolism,

but that, as Miss Mary Paton Ramsay, in a deeply interesting study,<sup>1</sup> reminds us, Donne's mediævalism was especially strong in his conception of human knowledge. Science and philosophy were merely paths to illumination; they subserved theology in its widest sense. In the passage just quoted, he anticipates Thompson by declaring 'This body is an Illustration of all Nature'. Many of the finest passages in his sermons and Devotions are elaborations of this and equally mystical conceptions. To Donne the universe was a theatre, a theatre which in its sacred proceedings is not very unlike the Cathedral which would embody Thompson's conception. Donne conceived of mankind as the audience which took their places in this theatre to behold the appearances of God. He knew and said that the soul reflects God, as in a mirror; and alternatively that it is an epitome or Index of the great book of Creation. Even his poetry of profane love brings him into touch with Thompson:

To one neutral thing both sexes fit,  
We die and rise the same, and prove  
Mysterious by this love.

The alchemy of sexual love consumes time and mortal selves, leaving eternity and immortal spirit. Between this vision and Thompson's, the link is Shelley, disciple of Spinoza. But Donne himself transcends it in a deeper synthesis. In his elegy on Lord Harrington he writes:

Thou at this midnight seest me, and as soon  
As that sun rises to me, midnight's noon,  
All the world grows transparent and I see  
Through all, both Church and State, in seeing thee;

<sup>1</sup> 'Les Doctrines Médiévales chez Donne'.



And I discern by favour of this light  
 Myself, the hardest object of the sight.  
 God is the glass.

Here is the poet who lived in closer imaginative relationship with St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure, and Plotinus than with the great Elizabethans or their Greek and Latin sources. Thompson could write:

'It is a pedant who cannot see in St. Augustine one of the great minds of the world, master of a great style. Some flights in the *Confessions* are almost lyric, such as the beautiful "*sero te amavi*", or the magnificent discourse on memory. The last books, especially of the *City of God*, would sometimes be no wise incongruous beside the *Paradiso* of Dante. St. Bernard's prose rises at times into a beauty which is essentially that of penetratingly ethereal poetry: not for nothing has Dante exalted him in the *Paradiso*; not for nothing does such a man exalt such men. In them is the meat and milk and honey of religion; and did we read them our souls would be larger-boned.'

Donne's lively sense of sin and of death is part of his mediævalism, though his mediæval sympathies are traceable to his temperament. It is fitting therefore to remark that St. Augustine anticipates the feeling in 'The Hound of Heaven', and that this feeling of pursuit, of being hunted by the Divine love is peculiarly a development of mediæval Christianity. Evelyn Underhill declares:

'It is common to all the mediæval mystics: it is the obverse of their general doctrine of the necessary fusion of human and divine life, "escape from the flame of separation".'

' "I chased thee, for in this was my pleasure," says the voice of Love to Mechthild of Magdeburg; "I captured thee, for this was my desire; I bound thee, and I rejoice in thy bonds; I have wounded thee, that thou mayst be united to me. If I gave thee blows, it was that I might be possessed of thee." ' 1

Thompson is not erotic in this way, however, and closer in spirit to him is the Middle English poem, '*Quia amore langueo*', from which Miss Underhill quotes:

I am true love that fals was nevere,  
 Mi sistyr, mannis soule, I loved hir thus,  
 Bicause we wolde in no wise discovere  
 I left my Kyngdom glorious.  
 I purveyde for hir a paleis precious;  
 She fleyth, I folowe, I soughte hir so.  
 I suffride this peyne piteous  
*Quia amore langueo.*

And Meister Eckhart's pregnant saying, which suggests the argument of half Thompson's poetry, and more than half of Patmore's:

'Earth cannot escape the sky; let it flee up or down, the sky flows into it, and makes it fruitful whether it will or no. So God does to man. He who will escape Him only runs to His bosom; for all corners are open to Him.'

One might continue to quote such mystical sayings, without coming nearer either to Donne or to Thompson. Donne's self-indignation and penitence and Thompson's feeling of pursuit by the knowledge of the reality which will strip his world of all temporal consolations, are both to be found in St. Augustine,

<sup>1</sup> *Mysticism*, by Evelyn Underhill, Part I, Chap. 6.

a rare spirit and a great mind who could speak to his peers with an irresistible eloquence. No poet or mystic is so near to them in this. Moreover all three have the common source of the Gospels. In Book IV, Chapter IX of the *Confessions*, St. Augustine refers to 'Thou art Truth' (John xiv. 6) and also to Psalms cxix. 42, 'And Thy law is truth', when he says:

'Thee none can lose save he that forsakes Thee; and whoso does forsake Thee, whither can he go, whither flee, but from Thy smile to Thy frown? For where in his punishment will he not find Thy law?'

In the next chapter of the *Confessions* is heard a kind of variation on the main motive of 'The Hound of Heaven'. 'Turn Thou us, O God of Hosts; shew us Thy countenance and we shall be saved', he quotes from Psalms lxxx. 19; or, in the Vulgate, lxxix. 20, and continues:

'For whithersoever the soul of man turns itself, unless to Thee, it cleaves unto sorrow; yea, even though it cleave to the fairest things, apart from Thee and apart from its own self. Fair things can have no being unless they have their being from Thee. Things come into being by birth, and grow towards perfection; and when perfected wax old and decay. All things grow not old but all decay. And when they have been born and are pressing towards Being, the swifter their growth, the swifter is their flight towards Not-Being. Such is the law of them. Thus much hast Thou appointed them, because they are but parts which may not exist all together, but complete that whole whereof they are parts by their very departures and

successions. Even so is our speech made up of sound symbols; utterance is not completed until each word, its syllables spoken, has passed away before its successor.'

It is unnecessary to quote from 'The Hound of Heaven', which must be ringing in the reader's mind. The chapter continues by introducing some ideas only implicit in this ode, though familiar argument of other poems of Thompson:

'Let my soul, in the midst of this transient show, praise Thee, O God, Creator of All, but let it not cleave with the senses and be fastened to them by desire. For the things of the world go whither they were always bound, towards not-being, and rend her with feverish regrets, because she, yearning to repose in what she loves, desires to keep them. But there is no place of rest among the unabiding objects of this world: they flee away, and who can follow them with the sensual sight? Who can comprehend them, even close at hand? The perception of the senses is slow, because it is the perception of the senses, and is limited to the senses. . . .'

This might seem as close a parallel as one could expect to find for a poem like 'The Hound of Heaven', but in Book VI, Chapter XI, St. Augustine tells of his perplexity as he deliberated on a new life; and in the conclusion he describes an experience identical with the poet's. Only the secondary circumstances differ. But first he refers to an intellectual conflict more like Donne's:

'And I, troubled deeply and musing, wondered most at the lapse of time since my nineteenth year,

in which I had first fallen in love with wisdom and determined, as soon as I could obtain her, to abandon all the empty hopes and false fantasies of vain desires. And lo, I was now in my thirtieth year, still stuck fast in the same mire, greedy still of enjoying the present, which fled distractingly from me, still telling myself: "To-morrow I shall find it; the truth will appear, and I will lay hold on it", or, "Lo, Faustus will come, and make everything clear", or, "O, you sage men of the Academy, is there indeed no certain thing which man may grasp as a guide for life?"; or "nay, let us seek but the more diligently, and let us not despair". Let everything go; dismiss these empty vanities, and devote all to the quest for truth. Life is wretched, Death is an uncertainty. If it should steal suddenly upon me, how shall I go hence, and where shall I learn what here I have neglected? Shall I not rather have to pay the penalty of my negligence? What if death should cut off and end all care and feeling? This also must be investigated. But God forbid that it should be so! It is no vain thing and empty that the authoritative dignity of the Christian faith has so overspread the world. Never would such things so great have been wrought for us by God if body's death was also death to the soul. Why then do I delay to cast off the hopes of the world and to give myself up completely to the quest of God and the blessed life?

'Yet stay. Even the things of this life are pleasant, and have no little sweetness. . . . While I considered, and my heart was driven this way and that by the shifting wind, time passed on, and I delayed from day to day the life in Thee, but I could not put off the daily death in me. Loving the beatific life I feared

to seek it in its very home, and fled it while still seeking.'

In this way, with St. Augustine as a link, the *rapprochement* of Donne and Thompson may be seen to overcome controversial and temperamental divergencies. Of such is Donne's anti-Jesuit satire on Ignatius. Even in so unpropitious a moment, however, the mystical satirist is found developing one of his favourite arguments, that scientific discoveries only unveil mystical realities, an argument which of course Thompson is continually clothing in magnificent symbolism. Thompson does not scorn science in the 'Anthem of Earth', for instance, but only the pseudo-scientific determinist, when of science he says:

old noser in its prideful straw  
That with anatomizing scalpel tents  
Its three-inch of thy skin, and brags 'All's bare'—  
The eyeless worm, that, boring, works the soil,  
Making it capable for the crops of God.  
Against its own dull will  
Ministers poppies to our troublous thought,  
A Balaam come to prophecy,—parables,  
Nor of its parable itself is ware,  
Grossly unwotting; all things has expounded,  
Reflex and influx, counts the sepulchre  
The seminary of being, and extinction  
The Ceres of existence: it discovers  
Life in putridity, vigour in decay;  
Dissolution even, and disintegration,  
Which in our dull thoughts symbolize disorder,  
Finds in God's thoughts irrefragable order,  
And admirable the manner of our corruption  
As of our health. It grafts upon the cypress  
The tree of Life—Death dies on his own dart  
Promising to our ashes perpetuity,  
And to our perishable elements  
Their proper imperishability; extracting

Medicaments from; out mortality  
 Against too mortal cogitation; till  
 Even of the *caput mortuum* we do thus  
 Make a *memento vivere*. To such uses  
 I put the blinding knowledge of the fool,  
 Who in no order seeth ordinance;  
 Nor thrust my arm in nature shoulder-high,  
 And cry—"There's naught beyond!" How should I so,  
 That cannot with these arms of mine engirdle  
 All which I am; that am a foreigner  
 In mine own region?

It is difficult to resist quotation; the waves of perception crowd one after another to the mind's shore, and they set up a spiritual music more and more eloquent of Donne.

Who the chart shall draw  
 Of the strange courts and vaulty labyrinth,  
 The spacious tenements and wide pleasancess,  
 Innumerable corridors far withdrawn,  
 Wherein I wander darkling, of myself?  
 Darkling I wander, nor I dare explore  
 The long arcane of those dim catacombs,  
 Where the rat memory does its burrows make,  
 Close-seal them as I may, and my stolen tread  
 Starts populace, a *gens lucifugæ*;  
 That too strait seems my mind to hold,  
 And I myself incontinent of me.  
 Then go I, my soul-venting ignorance  
 With scabby sapience plastered, aye forsooth!  
 Clap my wise foot-rule to the walls o' the world,  
 And vow—*A godly house, but something ancient,*  
*And I can find no Master?* Rather, nay,  
 By baffled seeing, something I divine  
 Which baffles, and a seeing set beyond;  
 And so with strenuous gazes sounding down.  
 Like to the day-long porer on a stream,  
 Whose last look is his deepest, I beside  
 This slow perpetual Time stand patiently,  
 In a little sight.

The quotation must end, but the next passage is sounding still in the world of Donne, is sounding more insistently than ever of Donne, beginning 'In a little dust, in a little dust', and concluding in the kind of peroration beloved of Browne also, with its images of earth that 'gorgeest slow on purple æons of kings'; of 'Rabble of Pharoahs and Arsacidæ' who 'keep their cold house' in that womb which is a tomb. She has sucked down

How many Ninevehs and Hecatompvloï,  
And perished cities whose great phantasmata  
O'erbrow the silent citizens of Dis.

The living man's body is 'subject to ancient and ancestral shadows', and is

distraught  
With ghostly usurpation, dinned and fretted  
With the still-tyrannous dead; a haunted tenement,  
Peopled from barrows and outworn ossuaries.

NOTE: After this chapter had been passed for printing, the Bishop of Clifton and the Rev. Richard de Bary both wrote within a few days to remind me of the following striking phrases in St. Augustine's *Confessions* (Bk. IV, Chapter 4): '*Et ecce tu, imminens dorso fugitivorum Deus ultionum, et fons misericordiarum simul, qui convertis nos ad te variis modis!*' (And lo, Thou, at the heels of those who are fleeing from Thee, god of vengeance and yet Fountain of Pity, who turn'st us back to Thee in wondrous ways.)

To complete the chapter of coincidences, the Right Rev. G. Ambrose Burton added: "There's the "Hound of Heaven" in brief," while the Rev. Richard de Bary wrote: "A flashing phrase which possibly gave birth to Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven"."



## CHAPTER IX

### THE TRIUMPH OF DEATH

---

*'Death supplies the oil for the inextinguishable lamp of life.'*—  
S. T. COLERIDGE.

THE Thompson of the 'Anthem of Earth' shares an interest in mortality with Donne, and with Sir Thomas Browne. This pre-occupation produces in the work of Browne and of Thompson, but only rarely in Donne's (and in his prose), a quality which may be indicated though hardly defined as an admiration of the macabre beauty of death. Confronted with irrefragable and awful evidences of the mortality of those things which St. Augustine said are ever speeding into non-existence, the poets are aroused to their most sonorous harmonies and tenebrous splendour of imagery. Thompson was an enthusiastic admirer of Browne, as well he might have been, for Browne's prose is the richest in the poetic qualities of music, colour and evocative imagery of any in English literature. It has more of the gorgeousness of Thompson's diction<sup>1</sup> than De Quincey's which Thompson accurately described as 'great, unequal, seductive, and irritating'. In the essay on 'Seventeenth-Century Prose' he does justice to Browne's terseness, as well as his eloquent rhetoric, when 'the sentence dispreads like a mounting pinion'; and in his own prose he does seem to imitate on occasion Browne's 'level style', which 'is brief and serried, like this' (and he quotes from *Urn-Burial*):

'There is no antidote against the opium of time, which temporarily considereth all things; our fathers find their graves in our short memories, and sadly tell

<sup>1</sup> In his verse of course; his prose is not rich.

us how we may be buried in our survivors. Grave-stones tell truth scarce forty years. Generations pass while some trees stand, and old families last not three oaks.'

But the quotation suggests that the content of this passage appealed to the imagination of the poet of the 'Anthem of Earth'. Not only 'In a little dust, in a little dust', but also 'in a little sight', when wandering into his labyrinthine self his 'stolen tread'

Starts populace, a *gens lucifuga*,

or, ('Orient Ode') addressing the sun,

Yea, in glad twinkling advent, thou dost dwell  
Within our body as a tabernacle!

So Browne: 'Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us.'

But it is the vision of 'in a little dust' which is Browne's spirit working in Thompson, exploration and an endless seeking for the riddling meanings of the tomb. His aim, like Thompson's, was contemplation of time and eternity; he had not the troublous doubts of Donne, but his mind must go travelling across the museum of the mortal world looking upon the relics and mementoes of Death.

'Only, for him (poetic dream, or philosophic apprehension, it was this which never failed to evoke his wonderful genius for exquisitely impassioned speech) over all those ugly anatomical preparations, as though over miraculous saintly relics, there was the perpetual flicker of a surviving spiritual ardency, one day to reassert itself—stranger far than any fancied odylic gravelights!' <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Appreciations: Sir Thomas Browne*, by Walter Pater.

But if Browne was firm in his belief in the timeless life, it is the awful beauty of Death which is the subject of his poetry in prose. For Donne mortality is only a fear. Mediæval as he was, he could not escape preoccupation with the Avernian gloom which to Thompson and Browne only provides a contrast, though itself a fascination, to that 'invisible sun within us'. To the purest mystics that gloom when it settles on the mind is a dark valley to be traversed; it is the 'Dark Night of the soul' described by St. John of the Cross as consisting of two distinct experiences, a Night of the Sense and a Night of the Spirit. The former is a state of arid desolation and purgative fear; the Night of the Spirit is an experience which he describes in words which anticipate the sublime phrase of Vaughan:

There is in God, some say—  
*A deep, but dazxling darkness;*

This is a darkness which anticipates a spiritual dawn, and one feels that assured mystics like Browne and Thompson are capable of experiencing the beauty of death because in contemplation they enter into that condition. From this state Donne can only shrink. His *Hymn to God the Father* is a confession that he has not safely passed through the earlier experience, the Night of Sense. Asking forgiveness he ends his confession with:

I have a sin of fear that when I have spun  
 My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;  
 But swear by Thyself, that at my death Thy Son  
 Shall shine as He shines now, and heretofore;  
 And having done that, Thou hast done;  
 I fear no more.

But he could outface the first Night, and the aridity by which St. John of the Cross characterized it:

Thirst for that time, O my insatiate soul,  
And serve thy thirst with God's safe-sealing bowl;  
Be thirsty still, and drink still till thou go  
To th' only health; to be hydroptic so,  
Forget this rotten world; and unto thee  
Let thine own times as an old story be.

He has not the serenity of awe that is felt in the 'Anthem of Earth', the 'Ode to the Setting Sun', and the 'Orient Ode', and in *Hydriotaphia*, or *Urn-Burial*, and the 'Letter to a Friend'. This wonderful discovery of beauty in the terror of mortality, the erection of sublime thought upon a heap of dusty death, was never so finely effected in English poetry as it is by Shakespeare<sup>1</sup> and Browne, until Francis Thompson met the silence of sepulchral time with the 'shield and mirror' of faith bright with pain. He knew the second Night of the Soul, but so closely is his mysticism linked to song that he conceives the promised dawn in terms of poetic inspiration:

the wings  
Hear I not in prævenient winnowings  
Of coming songs, that lift my hair and stir it?  
What winds with music wet do the sweet storm foreshow!  
Utter stagnation  
Is the solstitial slumber of the spirit,  
The blear and blank negation of all life:  
But these sharp questionings mean strife, and strife  
Is the negation of negation.<sup>2</sup>

He knew too much to permit Despair to overcome this Persean spirit; but bound to human hungers, he day Particularly in *Hamlet* and in the Sonnets.  
odyl From the 'Night of Forebeing', an ode prefaced by a quotation  
1 Browne.

returns again and again to stare at the relics and intimations of mortality. Even during 'the Pentecostal miracle' of Spring:

Nature, enough! Within thy glass  
Too many and too stern the shadows pass.  
In this delighted season, flaming  
For thy resurrection-feast,  
Ah, more I think the long ensepulture cold,  
Than stony winter rolled  
From the unsealed mouth of the holy East;  
The snowdrop's saintly stoles less heed  
Than the snow-cloistered penance of the seed.<sup>1</sup>

Man, he reflects, 'dogs the secret footsteps of the heavens', and

Sifts in his hands the stars, weighs them as gold-dust,  
And yet is he successive unto nothing  
But patrimony of a little mold,  
And entail of four planks. 'Thou hast made his mouth  
Avid of all dominion and all mightiness,  
*All sorrow, all delight, all topless grandeurs,*  
All beauty, and all starry majesties,  
And dim transtellar things;—even that it may,  
Filled in the ending with a puff of dust,  
Confess—'It is enough.'

Indeed his 'Anthem of Earth' is almost a hymn to Death. And in the 'Ode to the Setting Sun' he must, hymning the creative divinity, assert:

Alpha and Omega, sadness and mirth,  
The springing music, and its wasting breath—  
The fairest things in life are Death and Birth,  
And of these two the fairer thing is Death.  
Mystical twins of Time inseparable,  
The younger hath the holier array,  
And hath the awfuller sway:  
It is the falling star that trails the light,  
It is the breaking wave that hath the might,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

The passing shower that rainbows maniple.

Is it not so, O thou down-stricken Day,  
That draw'st thy splendours round thee in thy fall?

The intensifying of interest in death, like the vivid apprehension of other planes of experience than that of the unregenerate Adam, is an outgrowth of the travail of Europe during the Middle Ages, from the time that Christianity penetrated the already disintegrating paganism of Greece and Rome. This interest was reflected in art as clearly as the new theology of the Christ and the Virgin Mother. It culminates in Dürer's engravings and woodcuts, and in some of Holbein's designs to represent the popular mythology of the *Danse Macabre*, an idea which can still inspire the modern cartoonist, as Raemaker's war-time satires proved. The horseman of Death is another survival of the mediæval concern with mortality, a concern which no doubt was increased by the menace of pestilence not less than by the Church's teaching on the after-life. Probably religious dogmas were partly an expression of the death-hunted mentality of a Europe constantly decimated by terrible scourges. But the skeleton at the feast of life was pre-Christian, just as was hell, the Virgin Mother of God, the Man-God, and the Trinity, which had previously been presaged in cruder attempts to symbolize the reality of the unseen.

Whether the expression of a sort of base epicureanism, or a genuine feeling for spiritual values, the *memento mori* was common to the earliest civilization. The skeleton (decked with roses) at the feast became in Rome an expression of the decadence; it was a text to be read: 'Let us eat and be merry for to-morrow we die'. But it probably was not always frivolous

in Rome, as it certainly was not always in Athens. In Egypt it was almost a ritual. The intention was 'to promote brotherly love between men, and to avoid those evils which tend to make them consider life too long when in reality it is too short',<sup>1</sup> which is an agreement with Plutarch,<sup>2</sup> who says that the Egyptian guests at the banquet were not incited to sensual indulgence by the grisly reminder, but to fellow-feeling. In the Bible and Apocrypha, death is introduced several times in an exhortation to wisdom. Was it not in St. Paul's castigation of the materialistic Corinthians that the ancient philosophy of 'let us eat and drink' was summed up? It is a feeling for death which pervades classical poetry and after the Renaissance takes on new guises, as in that popular poetic conceit about gathering 'rose-buds while ye may'. The philosophy of approaching death which Thompson represents as the juggernaut of 'night's slow-wheeled car',<sup>3</sup> is extended in the vast literature of tomb-stones. Sepulchral inscriptions throughout Christian Europe have contained warnings for the living as well as reflections on the destiny of the dead, and in these we have an important background for the macabre element in art. In pictorial art the realism of the maggot-infested corpse was rather too strong for modern taste, and the process of refinement by imagination went on mainly in literature. As Christian elements gradually fused with pagan in the Renaissance, the *memento mori* type of imagery became linked in art with representations of the Last Judgment. Petrarch's *Trionfi* apparently inspired many Renaissance

<sup>1</sup> Sir J. G. Wilkinson in *Rawlinson's History of Herodotus*.

<sup>2</sup> *Septem Sapientium Convivium* (c. 2).

<sup>3</sup> *Sister Songs*.

artists to produce their series of designs for the 'Triumph of Death'. The idea of the Last Judgment is peculiarly connected with the warning against mortality, because it is the only subject which inspired Christian art to depict an event of the future, though even this is prophecy in terms of history. When eventually it represented heaven, this was not imaged as the future dwelling-place of present human persons, such as were the Egyptian fields of Aaru, but as a dream-like picture of the past as a sort of eternal present. The celestial scenes are of the Virgin's assumption. The heaven of Christian art, like the Hades of Greek art, is an image of the past.<sup>1</sup>

This is precisely what we find in Thompson's poetry. He is not a singer of the future life, but rather of an Eden furnished with the beautiful imagery of the Christian theology. The future is as uninspiring to the mystic as the present, except as a timeless Now. When Della Seta remarks the ante-dating of the Christian Paradise, we may in the light of mystical poetry like Thompson's realize that this is the first step away from the time-enslaved Greek mythology to the conception of Heaven as an extension of the present, just beyond the sensual world, or rather a transfiguration of the sensual world and of the mortal self. When Thompson approaches the simple concreteness of the primitive Christian paradise, he is still outside time, as in the fantasy of 'The Making of Viola' and 'To My Godchild'. A seeming exception is the conclusion of the latter:

For if in Eden as on earth are we,  
I sure *shall* keep a younger company . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Religion and Art*, by Alessandro Della Seta, translated by Marion C. Harrison.



but he addresses the child who is to look for him as 'immortal mortal'; there is no speculation in this vision; it is a simpler transition to this new state than the passing from to-day into to-morrow. The suggestion of futurity is playfulness in Thompson, a conscious use of childlike myth, like his pleasure in drawing 'the bearded counsellors of God'. It is for him a poetic holiday from mystical reality. His vision of the reality which in these child poems he playfully symbolizes, is hinted in the more serious 'To a Poet Breaking Silence'.

The loom which mortal verse affords,  
 Out of weak and mortal words,  
 Wovest thou thy singing-weed in,  
 To a rune of thy far Eden.  
 Vain are all disguises! Ah,  
 Heavenly *incognita*!  
 Thy mien bewrayeth through that wrong  
 The great Uranian House of Song!

The 'far Eden' is here all the time, at the heart of mortality, and revealed in glimpses of beauty.

As the vintages of earth  
 Taste of the sun that riped their birth,  
 We know what never-cadent Sun  
 Thy lampèd clusters throbbèd upon,  
 What plumèd feet the winepress trod;  
 Thy wine is flavorfulous of God.  
 Whatever singing-robe thou wear  
 Has the Paradisal air;  
 And some gold feather it has kept  
 Shows what Floor it lately swept!

His knowledge is of the life closer to him than the pulse of his heart. This mortal beat makes him declare to the Dead Cardinal:

The sandy glass hence bear—  
 Antique remembrancer:  
     My veins  
 Do spare its pains;

for, as earth

    feels her breast turn sweet  
 With the unconceived wheat;  
     So doth  
 My flesh foreloathe  
 The abhorred Spring of Dis,  
 With seething presciences  
     Affirm  
 The preparate worm.

In this poem he combines the personally particular disgust with his ruined body and the feeling of the universal mortality. When he says

The grave is in my blood

he is conscious of his wrecked body's over-hasty anticipation and prefiguring of death, but he soon turns to the spiritual pain of the poet who asks not worldly praise and material rewards but 'just love entire':

He asks, not grudging pain;  
 And knows his asking vain,  
     And cries—  
 'Love! Love!' and dies,  
 In guerdon of long duty,  
 Unowned by Love or Beauty;  
     And goes—  
 Tell, tell, who knows!

The unanswered question illustrates the distinction recognized by the mystic between a 'future state' and the paradised Now. If he is lost to Love or Beauty now, he knows that the triumph of death is no triumph

of his spirit. Death is only a *spiritual* gateway to life, not a physical corridor. The poet in Thompson marvelled at the tremendous material conquests of Death; they are part of the terrible and sublime Motherhood of Earth, who herself is a symbol of Paradise. His conception of Death has no popular Couéism about it; it would not be adequately stated in Longfellow's simile:

There is no death! What seems so is transition;  
This life of mortal breath  
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,  
Whose portal we call Death.

To the mystic sleep is the brother of Death, as truly as it was to the unmystical Homer, and to many poets since, not, as Mr. Havelock Ellis says,<sup>1</sup> the elder brother of Life. Mr. Ellis's assumption is that, since 'the most fundamental and the most primitive forms of psychic life, as well as the rarest and the most abnormal, all seem to have their prototype in the vast world of dreams', sleep is the state in which this vague vast world is most active. But *that* life is only raw material of reality; unregenerate, it must perish at the touch of Death. Shelley says:

Death is the veil which those who live call life;  
They sleep, and it is lifted,<sup>2</sup>

and he is using language almost platitudinous for mystics.

The paradox can be unfolded. Mr. Ellis quotes Bergson on the condition we call sleep:

'The dream state is the substratum of our normal

<sup>1</sup> *The World of Dreams; Conclusion.*

<sup>2</sup> 'Prometheus Unbound', III, 3.

state. Nothing is added in waking life; on the contrary, waking life is obtained by the limitation, concentration, and tension of that diffuse psychological life which is the life of dreaming. The perception and the memory which we find in dreaming are, in a sense, more natural than those of waking life: consciousness is then amused in perceiving for the sake of perceiving, and in remembering for the sake of remembering, without care for life, that is to say for the accomplishment of actions. To be awake is to eliminate, to choose, to concentrate the totality of the diffused life of dreaming to a point, to a practical problem. To be awake is to will; cease to will, detach yourself from life, become disinterested: in so doing you pass from the waking ego to the dreaming ego, which is less *tense*, but more *extended* than the other.'

'Perceiving for the sake of perceiving' is, in brief, the state of illumination, in which the artist creates and the mystic, it may be intermittently, dwells. If to eliminate and select is to be awake, the artist and the mystic are awake; they employ the intellect to transcend the limitations of the practical reason. Unless Bergson's expression 'a practical problem' is taken to include this paradoxical purpose his account of the conscious waking state will not cover the most important activity of the human intellect. Science alone is a fragmentary experience accumulated in response to biological needs. But Bergson does go much farther than the passage quoted by Mr. Ellis would suggest. In *Creative Evolution* he notes the practical nature of the intellect, which has caused a separation between the consciousness and universal life, so that the more profound instinctive intelligence

which is at one with life has been lamed in man, who has developed intuition to replace the lost instinct as a means of extending knowledge beyond the reason. In this way the individual transcends what is usually meant by consciousness.

The mystics are the scientists of disinterested experience; they are the supreme artists of the will. Their conscious purpose, the use they make of the intellect through intuition, is to direct emotion into certain channels, and to concentrate 'the diffused life of dreaming' (which is the life of the primitive soul) to a peak of experience transcending the reason. A very determined attempt is being made by the psychologists to fit the facts of transcendence into a deterministic scheme, in which mystical experience can be explained as the product of the 'unconscious' instead of an exploitation or rebirth of that primitive life of the soul by a creative force beyond its ken. A philosopher like Eucken may call this transcendental principle the core of the mind; Kant called it 'the soul in man'; Browne said it was an 'invisible sun' in the breast. The imagery in which transcendental reality may be expressed is the stuff of poetry. Poetry is largely a transcendental metonymy for intuitions otherwise inexpressible; the imagination casts a material veil of words over the immaterial reality. When Thompson thinks of the sun's light, and says:

Beauty is beautiful but in thy glance,

he is only saying that physical light by radiation provides this veil of sensory experience which makes the pre-existent beauty apprehensible. Music is, like light, a metonymy of that inner truth:

For haply our best instrument,  
 Pipe or cithern, stopped or strung,  
 Mimics but some spirit tongue.

Bacon said that 'men fear death as children fear to go in the dark'. Death is a darkness, which like silence may be eloquent, but is fearful to the natural man. To the waking mind silence and sleep are twin wings of darkness; they overshadow mystery. 'Silent as the grave' we say. Twin-brother to death. Did not Hypnos and Thanatos place the dead man in his tomb? Willingly deluded into a sense of daylight security, man instinctively clutches at certainties, but these elude the grasp of the conscious mind which can know only appearances. Certainty implies transcendence; but it is gained at the price of pain, and it is natural to fear pain. Often the boldest do not unreluctantly leave the precincts of the common day; Donne made his mind into a hell before discovering heaven; a great agony drove Dante along the doleful road to Paradise. Only the elect have travelled joyously through the valley of the shadow of death, and their testimony is a choral affirmation of the deeps beyond deeps of light past the shadow of the unknown. The symbols of the imagination can express such an experience only as a kind of allegory or parable. Our consciousness streams between silence and sleep, darkness and death, which may be likened to the banks of the river of life. At intervals, perhaps when the current is narrowed and swift, fresh tributaries cut through the banks from the surrounding universe of mind. Thus we are 'wiser than we know' and in the sense of a pervading unity may realize ourselves one in origin with the remainder of Nature, that sensual phasis of God. Thompson's 'Anthem of Earth'

is inevitably a hymn to Death, because natural life is a chain of individual lives starting out of a previous individual death and ending in a succeeding individual birth. The whole chain has no more meaning than a repetition of each link. Intelligence has to transcend natural life to perceive that the chain has no end but completes a cycle, even as the life of the individual is a cycle. It was Kant whose researches into the intellect brought him to the point where he could say: 'The body would thus be not the cause of our thinking, but merely a condition restrictive thereof, and, although essential to our sensuous and animal consciousness, it may be regarded as an impeder of our pure spiritual life.' The mystic knows that 'the body' includes the mortal mind which thinks in terms of time and space for purely practical reasons. The poet finds in the body, and in sensory experience, the symbols for transcendental knowledge. When poetic and mystical perceptions occur to the same mind religion is made articulate in words, and the commonest theme of religion is the spiritual necessity of rebirth, which implies death. In 'Sanctity and Song', referring to the second of the three canticles of St. Francis, Thompson says:

'It emphasizes the fire and torments of that Love which the Saint has rashly tempted—to find, alas! that the gates of the beatific Love are guarded by the purgatorial Love.'

In 'The Hound of Heaven' he expresses poetically the mystical annihilation of the natural man, the breaking down of self-love, by the concentrated light of the supernatural reality symbolized as Love. This divine Lover is the Pursuer because the poet, like St.

Augustine at a similar stage of knowledge, feared to find what he had sought, and would not 'seek it in its very home'; to do this implies a renunciation of the world which is emotionally the equivalent of death. The beautiful nature imagery in Thompson's ode is a completion of the meaning of those lines on Alpha and Omega in the 'Ode to the Setting Sun'. The dying day which draws its splendours round it in its fall is a symbol of the natural man consumed by celestial fire until only the beauty in his heart is left. What is left is not a residue but a transmutation; nature is resumed in spirit; what he loved is become through loss a part of eternal Love in which his love is subsumed:

'All which I took from thee I did but take,  
     Not for thy harms,  
 But just that thou might'st seek it in My arms.  
     All which thy child's mistake  
 Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:  
     Rise, clasp My hand, and come!  
     Halts by me that footfall:  
     Is my gloom, after all,  
 Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?  
     'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,  
     I am He Whom thou seekest!  
 Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me.'

The triumph of Death is eternal life.



## CHAPTER X

### NATURE POETRY

---

*'If the mind penetrates deeply into the facts of æsthetics, it will find, more and more, that these facts are based upon an ideal identity between the mind itself and things.'*—RÉGÉJAC.

*'... again the old awe steals over him.'*—PLATO.

**A**LICE MEYNELL and her husband, accompanied by the poet, cured of the morphia habit for the time being, with nearly all his poetic output behind him, visited Wilfrid Blunt at Newbuildings on October 12, 1898. Blunt's record of this first meeting is in his Diaries:

'I met them at the station, a very lovely day, and as we drove through the woods, Meynell pointed out to me that the poet of nature was wholly absorbed in the *Globe* newspaper he had brought down with him in the train, such being the way with London poets. Thompson, though born in Lancashire and speaking English with a broad provincial accent, is a true Cockney. He is a little weak-eyed, red-nosed young man of the degenerate London type, with a complete absence of virility and a look of raptured dependence on Mrs. Meynell which is most touching. He is very shy, but was able to talk a little when the conversation was not too loud, and he seems good-hearted and quite unpretending. He has written no poetry, Meynell tells me, now for some years, being cured of his morphia. But Meynell thinks the fountain may some day break forth again. Meanwhile, he gets a living by literary criticism in the *Academy* and other journals. When we all went out after luncheon to the woods, I found him quite ignorant of the names of the commonest trees, even the elm, which he must

have seen every day in London. I pointed one out to him, and he said, "I think, a maple". On the whole, however, I liked him, for he was quite simple and straightforward. Only it was difficult to think of him as capable of any kind of strength in rhyme or prose.'

This passage is full of suggestion. Blunt himself was as complete an antithesis as could be well imagined of this one-lunged, worn, instrument of divine musics. Blunt, who could turn sonnets of manly enthusiasm for hunting and well-bred horses, could not put into verse a tithe of the strength which had flowed from Thompson. Yet, making all allowances for Blunt's difficulty in getting at the personality concealed by the shy and unimposing exterior, the vivid picture is true in essentials. It is not the picture of a poet of nature; at least it is not the picture of the man who lives physically close to earth. It is unlike any conceivable portrait of a Borrow, a Wordsworth, a Walter Scott, or even a Goethe or Tennyson. Given other secondary conditions, and somewhat different terms to replace Blunt's idea of the cockney, the picture might not have been unlike an unsympathetic contemporary's impression of a Chatterton, a Verlaine, a Coleridge or a Keats. "There is death in that hand", was Coleridge's most memorable remark after a chance meeting and handshake with Keats. Making what allowances we will for the influence of intellectual fashions, which might at a given period encourage the care taken by a poet to be scientifically accurate in the statement of fact, a broad distinction is possible between the poetry which illuminates facts, and the poetry which makes facts illuminate an otherwise inapprehensible inner reality. The prevailing distinction may be traceable

only in the predominance of a tendency to one or the other type of thinking by a particular poet; indeed, the work of no great poet is confined to either division. The following illustrations of the subject are all relative to this truth. The two types of poetry will correspond to two of the most fundamental characteristics of mental activity; Jung termed them introversion and extroversion.

The nature poetry which lives as creative fantasy first and a reflection of natural phenomena second, comes from minds which take just those appearances of nature which will serve as symbolic vesturing of the inner spirit. Usually there is little of the botanist or the agriculturist about such poets. Their attention is engaged by the light that never was on land or sea, and objective details only catch their gaze when needed to complete the imagery of the abstract reality. Tennyson could be sufficiently interested in sensory experience to imitate nature in verse; but

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,  
And murmuring of innumerable bees,

did not engage Thompson's mind enough to make him translate such sounds for their own sake. A poem lamenting the loss of a friend is filled by Tennyson with beautiful pictures livingly copied from the English country-side. Thompson would not have written so faithfully as Tennyson of actual flowers, except accidentally, as when he described the poppy as a yawn of fire. He did not write like Tennyson in these and many other verses:

Bring orchids, bring the foxglove spire,  
The little speedwell's darling blue,  
Deep tulips dash'd with fiery dew,  
Laburnums, dropping-wells of fire.

He was at once too passionate and too abstracted to be so interested in isolated objects. When he does incorporate detailed impressions of something familiar, he has usually first seen it imaginatively in some other poet's words. *Sister Songs* constitute his hymn to spring; but there is little record of direct observations except in rare lines like:

I know in the lane, by the hedgerow track,  
The long, broad grasses underneath  
Are warted with rain like a toad's knobbed back,

which prove that he possessed the art to translate what he saw when a coincidence occurred so that his mood embodied what had intruded itself upon the retina of his physical eye. Compare the pointed, photographic brevity of Tennyson's

Laburnums, dropping-wells of fire  
with Thompson's complicated elaboration:

Mark yonder, how the long laburnum drips  
Its jocund spilth of fire, its honey of wild flame.

This is part of the statement which is completed in the next two lines:

Yea, and myself put on swift quickening,  
And answer to the presence of a sudden Spring.

Neither of these couplets alone is typical of Thompson's nature poetry, which combines the natural image with the symbolic image. The lines immediately following the above in the 'Proem' of *Sister Songs* exemplify this:

From cloud-zoned pinnacles of the secret spirit  
Song falls precipitant in dizzying streams;  
And, like a mountain-hold when war-shouts stir it,  
The mind's recessed fastness casts to light  
Its gleaming multitudes, that from every height  
Unfurl the flaming of a thousand dreams.

The lines which succeed the clearly defined picture of the grass and the toad's back (worthy of Tennyson's most vivid descriptiveness) again return to the essential Thompson :

In the new-sucked milk of the sun's bosom  
Is dabbled the mouth of the daisy-blossom;  
The smouldering rosebud chars through its sheath;  
The lily stirs her snowy limbs,  
Ere she swims  
Naked up through her cloven green,  
Like the wave-born Lady of Love, Hellene.

'Did you ever!' might exclaim that old lady who said she had never seen a sunset like Turner's. It is a shallow criticism which can see only vagueness in such imagery; the poet has removed himself farther from the object because he is less concerned to describe than to use it in expressing a spiritual state. Swinburne, another of Thompson's contemporaries, is a writer of nature poetry farther still from facts, and Mr. T. Earle Welby<sup>1</sup> is helpful when he remarks of Swinburne:

'As a metrician he subdues the individual word to the metrical need much more than any poet anxious for immediate intellectual effect could possibly consent to do. But words with him were subdued also by the nature of this intellectual demand on them, that they should be congruous with the general scheme of the poem rather than sharply expressive in their immediate context. Then, too, his preference for undefining epithets helps to produce that haze and iridescence in which he usually moves. Highly particularized facts can gain no admission into such writing, nor can

<sup>1</sup> *A Study of Swinburne* (1926).

anything be steadily placed in that undulant hastening verse.'

Thompson had no 'preference for undefining epithets'. No poet has a clearer brilliance of definition than Thompson on occasion, but what he defines are not 'highly particularized facts', but a sharp perception of abstract connections between the seen and the unseen. He does not 'subdue the individual word to the metrical need', though his metrical effects are finer than his verbal melody; he neglects the photographic detail for the spiritual intuition: spiritual concordances were to Thompson what metrical harmonies were to Swinburne, and his poetry of Nature is frequently a triumph of emotional energy won in despite of poverty of material. It is also a triumphant assertion of the superiority of imagination over scientific method in the discovery of truth; but this is to anticipate conclusions which must be reached by traversing a wide field.

The two kinds of nature poetry are constantly appearing. Compare Wordsworth's skylark, loyal to 'the kindred points of heaven and home', and his woman, not too angelic for 'human nature's daily food', to Shelley's impossible Lady and equally impossible skylark. The distinction emerges once more of poetry exalting fact into emotional reality, and of poetry which irresistibly invades nature, and disintegrating facts (which are customary sequences of ideas) fuses them into a new and self-luminous whole. This new visionary whole is not born out of conceptions necessarily different in kind from those to be found in the more objective poetry of Nature, but it does present a different aspect of the one beauty. Its appeal, like

its primary impulse in the poet's heart, concerns a deeper, less rational sphere of the mind; it is closer to the evocative quality of the underlying associative thought of dreams which it employs in a synthesis of human experience transcending the intellect.

Nature poetry ranges over the gamut of the mind's activity, at one extreme becoming prosaic and unevocative, like science, at the other extreme being vague and incoherent, and full of disturbing hints felt but not defined. This characteristic is not one which distinguishes mystical poetry; it may be found in mystical poetry—it is occasionally in Thompson's—but it is more likely to be found in pseudo-mystical poetry like Mallarmé's, which was composed in obedience to a theory that this disintegration of rational order was the approach to the otherwise inexpressible. Most of Thompson's poetry of nature is ample proof that mysticism is not the enemy of clarity: the 'Anthem of Earth' is clear and coherent enough; 'The Hound of Heaven' is not obscure, though it contains subtleties of perception which demand a close and delicate appreciation. The scientific and prosaic extreme is reached in the classical poetry devoted to the arts of husbandry, which in its finest examples, such as Virgil's *Georgics*, is a model and source of much modern nature poetry, especially of Tennyson's. Book Ten of *De re Rustica*, by Virgil's ancient imitator, Columella, is instructive, because it foreshadows a type of artificial nature poetry which distinguishes the English so-called Age of Reason. Columella is not illustrious as a poet, but he is enthusiastic; and he felt that while prose was good enough for the scientific and traditional lore of agriculture in the remaining eleven books

of his *magnum opus*, nothing less than verse would do for his book on gardening. Not being a poet, he breaks out into a play of fancy, and his gardener's guide is turned into a hospice for Bacchus and Ariadne, the Atlantides, Neptune, Venus, Erigone, Daedalus, Priapus, and the Pierian Muses. In a passage on Spring he reminds us of Lucretius' apostrophe to Venus. The reminder takes us at a bound from the nature poetry which culminated in Tennyson to the other kind, of which Shelley and Francis Thompson are the greatest creators in English. Lucretius makes poetry out of scientific observation, and is therefore in the Tennysonian camp, but he also loses himself at moments, when his rational sequence is destroyed and melted down in a new and profounder vision.

Before pursuing this trail, it should be noted that the 'Age of Reason', identified with the less imaginative, more conventional nature poetry, was not bereft of that to which modern criticism has confined the term. Romanticism, by encouraging the freedom of imagination, was propitious to the development of what we may call the more visionary nature poetry. But the spirit of this poetry never died out in England. It is strong in the Renaissance poets, especially in Spenser, Marlowe and Shakespeare. During the eighteenth century it was working not only in the well-known cases of James Thompson, Cowper, Collins, Gray and Pope. Early in the century a host of minor poets kept it alive. John Dyer, for instance, published two poems in 1727, 'Grongar Hill' and 'The Evening Walk', which were modelled on Milton's 'Allegro' and 'Penseroso'. Dyer does advance from Milton's idea of nature as a pleasant embroidery, sufficiently to identify this type of work



with the impulse which produced the 'Lines on Tintern Abbey'<sup>1</sup> and 'The Witch of Atlas', but he belonged to his age:

Silent Nymph, with curious eye!  
Who, in the purple evening, lie  
On the mountain's lonely van,  
Beyond the noise of busy man,  
Painting fair the form of things,  
While the yellow linnet sings;  
Or the tuneful nightingale  
Charms the forest with her tale. . . .

Thomas Parnell, who died in 1718, precedes Dyer, and in the 'Hymn to Contentment' he is more bucolic although wearing the strait-jacket of the heroic couplet.

Come, country goddess, come; nor thou suffice,  
But bring thy mountain-sister, Exercise.  
Call'd by thy lovely voice, she turns her pace;  
Her winding horn proclaims the finish'd chase;  
She mounts the rocks, she skims the level plain,  
Dogs, hawks, and horses crowd her early train.  
Her hardy face repels the tanning wind,  
And lines and meshes loosely float behind.  
All these as means of toil the feeble see,  
But these are helps to pleasure, join'd with thee.  
O come, thou goddess of my rural song,  
And bring thy daughter, calm Content, along!  
Dame of the ruddy cheek and laughing eye,  
From whose bright presence clouds of sorrows fly:  
For her I mov' my walks, I plant my bowers,  
Clip my low hedges, and support my flowers;  
To welcome her, this summer-seat I drest;  
And here I court her when she comes to rest.

It is noticeable how the personification of classical divinities is being exchanged for colloquial terms.

There are many other hints of the growth of the

<sup>1</sup> The poet of 'Tintern Abbey' is of course among the visionaries.

poetry of insight in better-known work, like the *Night Thoughts* of Young and *The Grave* of Robert Blair, who could inspire Blake. Even the courtly Shenstone yields at moments to the spell. They are all strongly tinged, however, with the eighteenth-century "augustan" spirit. Some of the most surprising anticipatory work was done by the brothers Joseph and Thomas Warton, who, moreover, as critics and commentators were undermining the augustan citadel. Their accomplished father, Dr. Warton, comes into our argument with this happy anticipation of W. H. Davies, because it shows the eighteenth-century nature poetry steering an undetermined course, capable of developing in either of the two main directions. It hardly has the Wordsworthian feeling, but it is more romantic than classical, facts being subdued though not changed by any divine paradox into a personal vision:

On beds of daisies idly laid,  
 The willow waving o'er my head,  
 Now morning on the bending stream  
 Hangs the round and glittering gem.  
 Lull'd by the lapse of yonder spring,  
 Of Nature's various charms I sing:  
 Ambition, pride, and pomp, adieu;  
 For what has joy to do with you?  
 Joy, rose-lipp'd Dryad, loves to dwell  
 In sunny field or mossy cell;  
 Delights on echoing hills to hear  
 The reaper's song, or lowing steer:  
 Or view with tenfold plenty spread  
 The crowded corn-field, blooming mead;  
 While beauty, health, and innocence  
 Transport the eye, the soul, the sense.

More remarkable and hardly better known to-day is the Countess of Winchilsea's lyrical poem "To a

Nightingale', which clearly anticipates Keats, Shelley and Meredith:

Exert thy voice, sweet harbinger of Spring!  
 This moment is thy time to sing,  
 This moment I attend to praise,  
 And set my number to thy lays:  
 Free as thine shall be my song,  
 As thy music, short or long;  
 Poets, wild as thou, were born,  
 Pleasing best when unconfined,  
 When to please is least designed,  
 Soothing but their cares to rest;  
 Cares do still their thoughts molest,  
 And still the unhappy poet's breast  
 Like thine, when best he sings, is placed against a thorn.  
 She begins! Let all be still!  
 Muse, thy promise now fulfill!  
 Sweet! oh sweet! still sweeter yet!  
 Can thy words such accents fit?  
 Canst thou syllables refine,  
 Melt a sense that shall retain  
 Still some spirit of the brain,  
 Till with sounds like those it join?  
 'Twill not be! then change thy note,  
 Let division shake thy throat!  
 Hark! division now she tries,  
 Yet as far the Muse outflies!  
 Cease then, prithee, cease thy tune,  
 Trifler, wilt thou sing in June?  
 Till thy business all lies waste  
 And the time of building's past?  
 Thus we poets that have speech—  
 Unlike what thy forests teach—  
 If a fluent vein be shown  
 That's transcendent to our own,  
 Criticize, reform or preach,  
 Censuring what we cannot reach.

It seems easier to skip the seventeenth century than the eighteenth, but the comparison of Crashaw

and Donne with Thompson shows that the mystical poets are among those who readily find in Nature images to wed with intuitions. That the seventeenth-century religious poets are not among the chief poets of Nature only goes to show the wide range of Thompson, who touches the genius of English poetry at so many points. Donne is the most interesting example in connection with this inquiry, because his subordination of other forms of human knowledge to theology does not prevent his energetic intellect probing facts. But he is not much concerned with the processes or appearances of Nature; he seeks from her only argumentative reinforcement of his metaphysics. In his illumination of an abstraction by a natural image he resembles Thompson:

To an unfetter'd soul's quick nimble haste  
Are falling stars and hearts' thoughts but slow paced.  
Thinner than burnt air flies the soul.

But in general 'The Progress of the Soul' is not to be compared with Thompson's great odes as poetry either of mysticism or of nature. How much of this inferiority may be due to his mediævalism, and the paucity of scientific background, cannot be determined with certainty, but the iconoclast and reactionary mood in which he often writes interferes with his vision as well as his art. Nevertheless, he does at moments probe deep, like Lucretius, with a white-hot fervour of imagination, and this is Thompson's greatest triumph also. Poets of the ilk of Columella use divinities as decorations, but Lucretius by his intensity recaptures the original significance of these personifications, which derived from Greece. It is the peculiarly Hellenistic element of Christianity which enables Thompson to ransack Nature for the

'congregated poesies' of an energetic imagination while maintaining the religious unity of his inspiration. Science is a fragmentary statement of experience; poetry a multitudinous presentation of beauty; but mysticism is a self-consistent orientation of the whole personality, which may exclude much of the field of science, though not necessarily. Thompson is able to make his mystical vision embrace a huge field of experience, including science, when he incarnates it in words. Tennyson is less rich in content and also more fragmentary because he is only a pseudo-mystic. The poet of the flower in the crannied wall, the poet who listened to the Two Voices, is not a profound nature poet but a reflective thinker and a sensitive reporter of contemporary thought. When he is mystical he wavers between moral platitude and sentimental faith. It would be absurd to call Thompson's faith sentimental. It was the light of his mind, the penetrating intuition which made the universe as vital and significant a symbol of reality as his own body. He is exigent for

The smouldering core of mystery

in the processes of Nature. Like the human Lady he divinizes that he may adore, he unveils the divinity of the sun and the earth and the seasons. His Autumn is the leader of a Bacchic revelry.

How are the veins of thee, Autumn, laden?  
 Umbered juices,  
 And pulped oozes  
 Pappy out of the cherry-bruises,  
 Froth the veins of thee, wild, wild maiden . . .

And in addressing her his verse is an incomparable riot of colour, which finally is calmed into the 'higher,

holier, saintlier', when 'All Nature sacerdotal seems'  
 . . . , and

The cowed Night  
 Kneels on the Eastern sanctuary stair.

After the Night, he hymns the moon's uprising,

The vapour at the feet of her,  
 And a haze about her tinged in fainter wise;  
 As if she had trodden the stars in press,  
 Till the gold wine spurted over her dress,  
 Till the gold wine gushed out round her feet,  
 Spouted over her stained wear,  
 And bubbled in golden froth at her feet,  
 And hung like a whirlpool's mist round her.

The force of the whole poem is overwhelming; it is the true Dionysiac madness, or, as the poet calls it, a 'Titanian, primal liturgy', which after the wild riot ends thus gravely:

I will not think thy sovereignty begun  
 But with the shepherd Sun  
 That washes in the sea the stars' gold fleeces;  
 Or that with Day it ceases,  
 Who sets his burning lips to the salt brine,  
 And purples it to wine;  
 While I behold how ermined Artemis  
 Ordained weed must wear,  
 And toil thy business;  
 Who witness am of her,  
 Her too in autumn turned a vintager;  
 And, laden with the lamped clusters bright,  
 The fiery-fruited vineyard of this night.

Keats' perfect and lovely ode to Autumn seems almost a tame thing beside the demoniac energy of the 'Corymbus'. All Thompson's great odes are a kind of Dionysian chanting which belongs to the supreme poetry of nature, notwithstanding their

profoundly religious import; or should we not say *because* of this adoration of the divinity behind nature? Thompson may have been a poor botanist, but what lore of earth and sky was his! Think of his images for the sun, only a few of them. From 'Ode to the Setting Sun':

When thou didst, bursting from the great void's husk,  
Leap like a lion on the throat o' the dusk;

'Cosmic metonymy' indeed!

Thou twi-form deity, nurse at once and sire!  
Thou genitor that all things nourishest!  
The earth was suckled at thy shining breast,  
And in her veins is quick thy milky fire.

When he can illustrate a central principle his mind seems to range more freely over natural phenomena. The principle of the sun's vital potency calls up a long series of images to show the 'teeming centuries'.

Who lit the furnace of the mammoth's heart?  
Who shagged him like Pilatus' ribbèd flanks?  
Who raised the columned ranks  
Of that old pre-diluvian forestry,  
Which like a continent torn oppressed the sea,  
When the ancient heavens did in rains depart,  
While the high-dancèd whirls  
Of the tossed scud made hiss thy drenchèd curls?  
Thou rear'dst the enormous brood;  
Who hast with life imbued  
The lion maned in tawny majesty,  
The tiger velvet-barred,  
The stealthy-stepping pard,  
And the lithe panther's flexuous symmetry.

In passing, it is to be noted that Thompson inclines to rhetoric in enumerating the illustrations of his argument, while Shelley tends to rhetoric in the

argument, not in the presentation of objects. Thompson is never less rhetorical and more poetic than when expressing the metaphysical thought.

Thompson's imagery to describe the sun alone would take up too much space to quote entire. It leaps to the eye in half of his poems.

With lucent feet imbrued,  
If young Day tread, a glorious vintager,  
The wine-press of the purple-foamed east;  
Or round the nodding sun, flush-faced and sunken,  
His wild Bacchantes drunken  
Reel, with rent woofs a-flaunt, their westerling rout.<sup>1</sup>

The glorious infusion of penetrating insight and Greek myth must not blind the reader to the fineness of the description in such passages. Even when the result of observation is concealed still more deeply:

As the innocent moon, that nothing does but shine,  
Moves all the labouring surges of the world,<sup>1</sup>

it cannot be ignored. The one epithet 'innocent' just there is proof enough of a complicate fusion of scenes in which the movements and disturbances of wind and cloud and wave contrast with the moon's white stillness. If Shelley frequently seems the inevitable explanation of beautiful subtleties, 'the heart's wild growths', 'swiftly bright',

Whose robes are fluent crystal, crocus-hued,  
Whose wings are wind a-fire, whose mantles wrought  
From spray that falling rainbows shake to air,<sup>1</sup>

they could not be mistaken for Shelley's by a discerning mind because the style is essentially Thompson's; and there is a host of equally subtle descriptions which did not need to be inspired by Shelley, e.g.:

<sup>1</sup> *Sister Songs*.



Go like twin swans that oar the surgy storms  
To bate with pennoned snows in candent air.

Small or immense objects are thrown with equal sureness into this palpitating life of poetry. Something has already been said as to the magical landscapes which are disclosed in women's eyes in his verse. Rossetti undoubtedly taught him the secret of that magic stillness of pre-Raphaelite art. Apart from such pictures of the inner mystery of the heart, Thompson uses elements of landscape almost as freely as distinct objects in nature like flowers, sun, moon, the 'twin swans', or the rain-stained grass. He, then, may be described as a more metaphysical Wordsworth. 'The Cloud's Swan Song' contains natural objects less clearly perceived than usual; but where they are most sharply defined they are used in the Wordsworthian kind of thinking, which is slower and more expansive than the plunging subtleties of Shelley, which are characteristic of Thompson. 'There is a parable in the pathless cloud' is not an opening for a typically Thompsonian poem, and both the music and mood suggests, if not exactly an imitation of Wordsworth, something that Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell would describe as a 'variation'. But the intimate personal note immediately brings with it the nature imagery needed by the mystic:

Like grey clouds one by one my songs upsoar  
Over my soul's cold peaks; and one by one  
They lose their little rain, and are no more . . .  
And whether well or ill, to tell me there is none.

The imagery serves both as symbolism and also as a colouring for the mood. His heart is forlorn, like those cold peaks drenched in grey mist. The same

objects serve to symbolize the contrasted opposite by a mere change of image:

For who can work, unwitting his work's worth?  
Better, meseems, to know the work for naught,  
Turn my sick course back to the kindly earth,  
And leave to ampler plumes the jetting tops of thought.

In 'Of My Friend' almost the same natural objects symbolize a completely different idea:

The moonlight cloud of her invisible beauty,  
Shook from the torrent glory of her soul  
In æry spray, hangs round her; love grows duty.  
If you that angel-populous aureole  
Have the glad power to feel;  
As all our longings kneel  
To the intense and cherub-wingèd stole  
Orbing a painted Saint: and through control  
Of this sweet faint  
Veil, my unguessing Saint  
Celestial ministrations sheds which heal.

Just as when he can illustrate a central principle by a natural force like the sun he seems to range most freely over the field of external objects, Thompson sees those objects most clearly when he most needs them to express an urgent inner perception. Facts and phantasy are thus mingled in his glowing imagery, and he can see all he wants to see of the phenomenal world—far more than Wilfrid Blunt ever saw!

Who made the splendid rose  
Saturate with purple glows;  
Cupped to the marge with beauty; a perfume-press  
Whence the wind vintages  
Gushes of warmed fragrance richer far  
Than all the flavourous ooze of Cyprus' vats?  
Lo, in yon gale which waves her green cymar,  
With dusky cheeks burnt red  
She sways her heavy head,

Drunk with the must of her own odorousness;  
While in a moted trouble the vexed gnats  
Maze, and vibrate, and tease the noontide hush.<sup>1</sup>

At his best the poet accomplishes miracles of recreation of nature beyond the reach of any other English poets except Keats and Shakespeare. Who else could have dared so successfully to adapt imagery in Keats' 'Ode to Autumn' and make his words as magical as the original? There is no word in Keats' ode more potent than that word 'maze' just there, and nothing more vivid and warm in English poetry than that picture of the wind-swayed rose. The tremendous invocation to the sun continues to pile up praise:

Who girt dissolved lightnings in the grape?  
Summered the opal with an Iris'd flush?  
Is it not thou that dost the tulip drape,  
And huest the daffodilly,  
Yet who has snowed the lily,  
And her frail sister, whom the waters name,  
Dost vestal-vesture 'mid the blare of June,  
Cold as the new-sprung girlhood of the moon  
Ere Autumn's kiss sultry her cheek with flame?

The symmetry of the poet's vision is emphasized by the reintroduction of ideas used in different settings elsewhere. These lines on the moon complete the personification in the 'Corymbus' by relating that Bacchic appearance to the remainder of the cyclic process. The poet never loses his grip on scientific reality; he transcends it. The next line after the last quoted is:

Beauty is beautiful but in thy glance,  
which contains the theory of radiation; and those

<sup>1</sup> 'Ode to the Setting Sun'.

'dissolved lightnings in the grape' are strangely anticipatory of the theory of electrical energy. This is not an unwarrantable suggestion. The electronic theory is very clearly included by Thompson in the profoundly symbolic account of the sun's potency in the 'Orient Ode'. Leave the 'Ode to the Setting Sun' then, although its riches have hardly been indicated yet (it concludes with a complete statement of the cycle of organic life and death and the indestructibility of matter), and look into the 'Orient Ode'.

## CHAPTER XI

### SCIENCE AND SANCTITY

---

*'Plant a conviction of harmony in the human soul, and the intellect can elucidate it; but it cannot create the harmony.'*—

J. MIDDLETON MURRY.

*'Oh, Beauty so old and so new, too late I have loved thee !'*—  
ST. AUGUSTINE.

THOMPSON'S two great odes to the sun afford clear evidence of his intellectual alertness to the scientific knowledge of his day, and in estimating his stature as a poet of Nature it is but fair to take this into account, although it constitutes an element in his work which can be grouped more conveniently under the above heading. In the 'Orient Ode' as in the 'Ode to the Setting Sun' is poetry in the high lineage of that infidel revolutionary's, which, like Shelley's, was transfigured by passionate insight into a divinizing oracle. The use made of science by Lucretius is in its penetrating effect an anticipation of Thompson's. Profound imaginative expression of the connections between phenomena must always contain a core of meaning which the 'old noser, science', will eventually prove by measurement. In the 'Orient Ode' the power of his imagination, when moved to adoration, enables the poet more than to hint at the electronic theory of matter and the relativity of time and space. The sun by his gazes, like the flatteries of a lover, that 'provoke the charms they swear', 'make the beauties they discover' in earth. There are some exquisite images to evolve the poet's continuing thought, until he reaches the idea of the revolving sun swinging the planets before him. The sun is a roaring lion:

Before thy terrible hunt thy planets run;  
Each in his frightened orbit wheels,  
Each flies through inassuageable chase  
Since the hunt o' the world begun,  
The puissant approaches of thy face,  
And yet thy radiant leash he feels.

The planets, held in their courses by a poise of counter-attractions and conflicting impulses of forces, are beautifully described—in a completion of the thought which was evolving just before the lion symbol, in the imagery of the sun's 'formidable sweets' given to the coy and startled earth. The planets are

Pricked with terror, leashed with longing,  
Thy rein they love, and thy rebuke they shun.

So the same vital power is in all forms of earthly life:

Since the hunt o' the world began,  
With love that trembleth, fear that loveth,  
Thou joimest the woman to the man;  
And Life with Death  
In obscure nuptials moveth,  
Commingleing alien yet affined breath.

There follows a tremendous series of epigrammatic praises to 'the incarnated Light'

Whose Sire is aboriginal, and beyond  
Death and resurgence of our day and night:

To the sun, as the giver of his sensory experience, the poet confesses:

My fingers thou hast taught to con  
Thy flame-chorded psalterion,  
Till I can translate into mortal wire—  
Till I can translate passing well—  
The heavenly harping harmony,  
Melodious, sealed, inaudible,  
Which makes the dulcet psalter of the world's desire.

We must pass over the poet's treatment of the sexual miracle, and the restatement of how the sun is 'the life of them that live'. But then he says:

Thou bittest with thine ordinance  
The jaws of Time, and thou dost mete  
The unsustainable treading of his feet.

This in its context can be read as an anticipatory use of the relativity theory of light. In *Sister Songs* is an equally clear conception of the reading of the bars of shadow across the spectrum in the analysis of the material constitution of heavenly bodies:

The very loves that belt thee must prevent  
My love, I know, with their legitimacy:  
As the metallic vapours, that are swept  
Athwart the sun, in his light intercept  
The very hues  
Which their confluent elements effuse.

Although Thompson was not interested in collecting facts, and, owing to circumstances as well as the preference for abstract ideas, seemed to Blunt woefully ignorant, he was unusually well-informed, and so far as his opportunities and strength permitted he showed an unusual understanding of the activities of 'the old noser, science', which would not have discredited the volatile mind of Goethe. Donne is the only important poet among Thompson's metaphysical precursors who shows a comparable attitude. The intellectual Vaughan in 'The Search' is representative of many others, and not only in his own times, when there was some excuse for impatience with 'science'. Vaughan's alchemical brother might have some responsibility for this attitude:

Leave, leave, thy gadding thoughts;  
 Who Pores  
 and spies  
 Still out of Doores  
 descries  
 With them nought.

The skinne and shell of things  
 Though faire,  
 are not  
 Thy wish, nor pray'r  
 but got  
 By meer Despair  
 of wings.

To rack old Elements,  
 or Dust  
 and say  
 Sure here he must  
 needs stay  
 Is not the way,  
 nor just.  
 Search well another world; who studies this,  
 Travels in Clouds, seeks *Manna*, where none is.

The conception of worship in Thompson's poetry is not exclusive and retiring, but all-embracing and adventurous. 'The Hound of Heaven' is not a rejection of 'Nature' but an affirmation of divine Love, which is the enemy of self-love; it is the emotional attachment to the temporal which obstructs that light which will reveal the eternal in the temporal.

I dimly guess what Time in mists confounds,  
 But ever and anon a trumpet sounds  
 From the hid battlements of Eternity,  
 Those shaken mists a while unsettle, then  
 Round the half-glimpsed turrets slowly wash again.

An American critic, writing of Vaughan, says:



'He is severely a poet of intimations. The visionary splendour of heaven wholly revealed, as in the typical poetry of Asiatic mystics, is totally missing in Vaughan. He will not take us into the gardens of heaven but from a station amidst the obscurities of earth he bows and trembles. The more Asiatic aspects of Christianity, as the doctrine of the hierarchies of the angels, are not to be found in Vaughan. Neither does he attempt to unriddle divine things with metaphysical subtleties. . . . He is innocent of all pride of logic or imagination. . . .'

The statement of negatives in this passage has merely to be turned into one of affirmatives to apply perfectly to Thompson, whose imagination has both the 'Asiatic' sensuousness of concrete symbolism and the metaphysical subtlety which 'attempts to unriddle divine things'. In a later chapter the so-called 'Asiatic' elements are traced to certain sources of the religion and literature of Christian Europe. Thompson's 'pride of logic and imagination' enables him to enrich the content of his poetry with the additions to our sensory experience of Nature made by science. It is possible, even probable, that the poet Goethe, who like Donne was a student of strange lore, helped to form Thompson's thought about Nature. Goethe, in his scientific discoveries about the metamorphosis of plants and his rhapsody on 'Nature',<sup>1</sup> shows the poet-scientist's attitude to the miraculous pageant of life. The following sentences seem especially interesting, though they are a statement of assumptions behind

<sup>1</sup> A translation of this rhapsody by Thomas Henry Huxley was printed in *Nature*, November 4, 1869. It was reprinted in the *Adelphi*, July, 1926, to which journal I am indebted for the reminder of what provides an extremely interesting comparison.

Thompson's vision rather than a reflection of the mystical view of Nature. That the chameleonic Goethe himself is not fully expressed in this rhapsody could be realized even if he had not confessed it.

'Nature! We are surrounded and embraced by her: powerless to separate ourselves from her, and powerless to penetrate beyond her. . . .

'She is ever shaping new forms: what is, has never yet been; what has been, comes not again. Everything is new, and yet nought but the old.

'We live in her midst and know her not. She is incessantly speaking to us, but betrays not her secret. We constantly act upon her, and yet have no power over her.

'The one thing she seems to aim at is Individuality; yet she cares nothing for individuals. She is always building up and destroying; but her workshop is inaccessible . . .

'Her life is in her children; but where is the mother? She is the only artist; working up the most uniform material into utter opposites; arriving, without a trace of effort, at perfection, at the most exact precision, though always veiled under a certain softness.

'Each of her works has an essence of its own; each of her phenomena a special characterization: and yet their diversity is in unity. . . .

'Incessant life, development, and movement are in her, but she advances not. . . .

'She has always thought, and always thinks; though not as a man, but as Nature. She broods over an all-comprehending idea, which no searching can find out.

'Mankind dwell in her and she in them. With all men she plays a game for love, and rejoices the more they win. With many her moves are so hidden that the game is over before they know it.

'That which is most unnatural is still Nature; the stupidest philistinism has a touch of her genius. Whoso cannot see her everywhere, sees her nowhere rightly.

'She loves herself, and her innumerable eyes and affections are fixed upon herself. She has divided herself that she may be her own delight. She causes an endless succession of new capacities for enjoyment to spring up, that her insatiable sympathy may be assuaged.

'She rejoices in illusion. Whoso destroys it in himself and others, him she punishes with the sternest tyranny. Whoso follows her in faith, him she takes as a child to her bosom. . . .

'Her mechanism has few springs—but they never wear out, are always active and manifold.

'The spectacle of Nature is always new, for she is always renewing the spectators. Life is her most exquisite invention; and death her expert contrivance to get plenty of life.

'She wraps man in darkness, and makes him for ever long for light. She creates him dependent upon the earth, dull and heavy; and yet is always shaking him until he attempts to soar above it. . . .

'Every instant she commences an immense journey, and every instant she has reached her goal. . . .

'She makes every gift a benefit by causing us to want it. She delays, that we may desire her; she hastens, that we may not weary of her.

'She has neither language nor discourse; but she creates tongues and hearts, by which she feels and speaks.

'Her crown is love. Through love alone dare we come near her. She separates all existences, and all tend to intermingle. She has isolated all things in order that all may approach one another. . . .

'She is an eternal present. Past and future are unknown to her. The present is her eternity. . . .

'She has brought me here and will also lead me away. I trust her. She may scold me, but she will not hate her work. It was not I who spoke of her. No! What is false and what is true, she has spoken it all. The fault, the merit, is all hers.'

Goethe, looking back at this work of his youth, wrote:

'I might term the degree of insight which I had then attained, a comparative one, which was trying to express its tendency towards a not yet attained superlative.

'There is an obvious inclination to a sort of Pantheism, to the conception of an unfathomable, unconditional, humorously self-contradictory Being, underlying the phenomena of Nature; and it may pass as a jest, with a bitter truth in it.'

Now the only solution of the riddle of Pantheism is the doctrine of Immanence, that Nature is saturated with God, as the cells of an electric accumulator may be saturated with electricity. You touch the electric poles and draw some of the power out into a spark of fire. Goethe's 'not yet attained superlative' is what the mystic knows as God; it is the source of that spiritual power in Nature which may

be drawn out into flame in the heart of Man. In this way the mystical synthesis of experience can find a place for science, which has already discovered the immaterial foundations of matter in the play of mysterious forces. The mystic and the poet regard the energy which 'works' the universe as an expression of love; genius draws upon this energy. One like Thompson, both mystic and poet, is impelled to see in sanctity a type of genius very similar to the creative faculty of the poet, whose passionate perception also spiritualizes Nature, that is to say, taps the spiritual current in Nature. Just as Donne stressed the subservience of philosophy to religion, Thompson emphasizes the subservience of body (which includes physical life in general) to spiritual creativeness, whether in the aspect of sanctity or of song. His plea for health as well as holiness is an argument that holiness is better served by health than by disease; and that Brother Ass should be rewarded for his usefulness, to make him more useful. The only value of pain is to strengthen the will when the soul passes through a 'process of seclusion and interior gestation'. The will must be subjected to 'heavenly magnetization' in 'both Saint and Poet', Science is a potential witness for an improved spiritual code; by investigating the laws of mind and body 'science, not for the sole time or the last, has become the witness and handmaid of theology'. But in his verse Thompson shows what he means by that 'heavenly magnetization'. 'Any Saint' is made to disclaim the capacity for complete knowledge by the individual; the whole of mankind and the endless chain of births and deaths is the 'Small ring of flesh' completing God's works:

Not to this man, but Man,—  
 Universe in a span;  
     Point  
     Of the spheres conjoint;

In whom eternally  
 Thou, Light, dost focus Thee!—  
     Didst pave  
     The way o' the wave;

Rivet with stars the Heaven,  
 For causeways to Thy driven  
     Car  
     In its coming far

Unto him, only him;  
 In Thy deific whim  
     Didst bound  
     Thy works' great round

In this small ring of flesh;  
 The sky's gold-knotted mesh  
     Thy wrist  
     Did only twist

To take him in that net.—  
 Man! swinging-wicket set  
     Between  
     The Unseen and Seen;

Lo, God's two worlds immense,  
 Of spirit and of sense,  
     Wed  
     In this narrow bed . . .

But not only human nature; the most trifling lives  
 also:

Yea, and the midge's hymn  
 Answers the seraphim  
     Athwart  
     Thy body's court!

And man, the 'compost of Heaven and mire', which the Omnific made as 'a secret metaphor' of some mystery beyond human thought, cannot grasp God's wholeness. He is immensely significant, but limited in comprehension, a

Trobe that itself not scans  
Its huge significance,  
Which tries  
Cherubic eyes!

The endless paradoxes of truth are thus dimly hinted in all the processes of life, and man is an 'equation of Creation', and capable of plucking down 'the neck of God'. He is a little channel of the infinite power. 'Holiness energizes.' And so Nature, lovingly studied, is 'the most potent ally of the Church and ultimate stickler for ascetic religion'<sup>1</sup>—a profound observation which Goethe was feeling towards, and which agrees with the most recent pronouncements upon the biological evolution, the process of refinement, of man, whose life within historical ages has become noticeably less brutish, sensual and brief. 'To the blind tyranny of flesh upon spirit will then visibly be opposed' Thompson says, anticipating the future science 'the serene and sapient awe of spirit upon flesh. Then will lie open the truth which now we can merely point to by plausibilities and fortify by instance: that Sanctity is medicinal, Holiness a healer, from Virtue goes out virtue, in the love of God is more than solely ethical sanity.'<sup>1</sup> Here and in the remaining sentences of his essay is foreshadowed a new science of happiness combining the truths of the old asceticism with the

<sup>1</sup> *Health and Holiness.*

sane delight in Nature. It is an anticipation of developments to come in poetry as well as in theology, and Goethe, had he been contemporaneous, would have hailed Thompson as a light-bringer.

Sanctity has been always hospitable to what we may call the poetry of Nature. This is not only because the mystics find the symbolism they need in material imagery, but arises from a sense of communion with the universal life manifested in natural forms. God is potential everywhere. Boehme, who is a poet of nature, as many mystics have been, says in *The Threefold Life of Man*: 'If thou conceivest a small minute circle, as small as a grain of mustard seed, yet the Heart of God is wholly and perfectly therein: and if thou art born in God, then there is in thyself (in the circle of thy life) the whole Heart of God undivided.'<sup>1</sup> Nature is a theophany of God, and the mystics may therefore be the priests of nature. 'Nature's immortality', says Thompson, means that it 'lives in the life of God', so, in Coventry Patmore's words, 'creation differs from subsistence only as the first leap of a fountain differs from its continuance'.<sup>2</sup> Only 'in so far, and so far merely, as man himself lives in that life, does he come into sympathy with Nature, and Nature with him. She is God's daughter who stretches her hand only to her Father's friends. Not Shelley, not Wordsworth himself, ever drew so close to the heart of Nature as did the Seraph of Assisi, who was close to the heart of God.'<sup>3</sup>

This is one of several references in the essays and poetry of Thompson to

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Underhill: *Mysticism*, Pt. I, ch. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower*: *Aurea dicta*.

<sup>3</sup> 'Nature's Immortality'.



'The Assisian, who kept plighted faith to three,  
To Song, to Sanctitude, and Poverty,'<sup>1</sup>

and in St. Francis he finds the best illustration for his principle that Sanctity and Song are expressions of the same reality. In *Moestitie Encomium* he quotes, to praise sadness, the proverb: 'The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.' The 'dolorous coquette of the Abyss' tempts him into a romantic vein, but the initial idea is again that Nature can refine by pain, and that, as Goethe said, 'she wraps man in darkness, and makes him for ever long for light'. In *Health and Holiness* the naturalness of sanctity is insisted on. When the Canticles assigned to St. Francis are his subject, Thompson leads up from this position to the difficulty which the natural man must have in understanding sanctity, and therefore in appreciating these Canticles, in which the purifying power of suffering is implicit.<sup>2</sup> But having so emphatically asserted elsewhere the poetic possibilities of sanctity, or the sacramental function of poetry, Thompson says strangely little of the Saint's communion with Nature. St. Francis acted poetry; his 'Praises of the Creatures' are only an overflow, a sacramentalism of mind and spirit. He is essentially a childlike poet in his attitude towards Nature. His imagination, tintured with the romantic atmosphere of mediæval Europe, readily created a world of phantasy which occupied precisely the intermediate position which poetry fills between the visible world and the invisible. His imagination, though more subservient than Thompson's to the life of the spirit, was a lamp of truth, as it was to the poet whose last poem declared:

<sup>1</sup> 'To My Godechild'.

<sup>2</sup> 'Sanctity and Song'.

O world invisible, we view thee,  
 O world intangible, we touch thee,  
 O world unknowable, we know thee,  
 Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

The 'poet could not 'cling heaven by the hems' without first investing the invisible with material symbolism. To the Saint as to Thompson, Brother Sun was to be exalted in praise as the source of light, and symbol of the Most High.<sup>1</sup> The flower garden cultivated by St. Francis to remind him by its perfume of the 'Eternal Sweetness' is clearly the original poem which inspired the purely verbal expression of 'Field-Flower' which was pushed up through the sod by God's fingers, so that

It came up redolent of God,  
 Garrulous of the eyes of God  
 To all the breezes near it;  
 Musical of the mouth of God  
 To all had ears to hear it;  
 Mystical with the mirth of God,  
 That glow-like did ensphere it.

St. Francis would do as well as another for the model of the poet who 'held his ways' 'beside the flower'

And leaned him to it gaze for gaze—  
 He took its meaning, gaze for gaze,  
 As baby looks on baby,

the one perfect image for the idea.

<sup>1</sup> 'Mirror of Perfection'.

## CHAPTER XII

### POETRY AND CHILDHOOD

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*'The Babe sucking its mother's breast, and the Lover returning after twenty years' separation, to his home and food in the same bosom, are the types and princes of Mystics.'*—COVENTRY PATMORE.

A BIOGRAPHER of St. Francis remarks: 'There are souls so pure, so little earthly, that on their first meeting they enter the most holy place, and once there the thought of any other union would be not merely a descent but an impossibility. Such was the love of St. Francis and St. Clare. But these are exceptions. There is something mysterious in this supreme purity; it is so high that in holding it up to men one risks speaking to them in an unknown tongue, or even worse.'<sup>1</sup>

The mystics themselves have a multitude of ways of presenting the fact of purity, and the poetic imagination draws on symbols taken from the material world. The pure in heart who see God share a directness of vision which is commonly attributed to childhood, which indeed is the soon-to-be lost heaven of childhood. The recondite simplicity of the mystic recaptures that primal creative energy of the mind though his state of grace is the fruit of pain while the child's innocence is the avoidance of pain. Von Hügel divides the spiritual life into three stages, the second of which is dominated by Duty, and is a constant striving to live the common and universal life of the spirit. The child and the mystic might be associated with the first and the third stages in this scheme. The first is that of the most complete individualism; the third

<sup>1</sup> Sabatier, *Life of St. Francis*, trans. by L. S. Houghton, p. 148.

has translated the obligation of the second stage into liberty, the uniformity into variety. 'Personality in the fullest sense of the term has now appeared.' These terms clearly have some reference also to the poet, whose mind is more apt than most men's to set perception free of the sophisticated intellect, which sets up the barriers of separation between the self and the not-self. The child's individualism is not a separation from other objects but a close identification and communion with them. The innocence of the unspoilt child is felt by poet and mystic as a prophetic type of heaven. St. Francis carried the childish poetry of action to its logical extreme. He revered water, and would not tread on it; he loved brother fire so much that he would not extinguish it, whatever was burning. He once saved a skin from being destroyed when a cell was on fire, though he refused to help put the fire out; afterwards he repented of his avarice in stealing the skin from his avid brother. Granted that the actions of St. Francis expressed, like poems, dark truths, the unintellectual innocence of mind is always apparent. His feeling for all the Creatures has something of the child's creative energy. The child perceives with sharp definiteness and thinks in images and tropes. Like poets children certainly see with exceptional intentness. Sully tells us of a little boy two years and five months old who on looking at the hammers of a piano which his mother was playing, called out: 'There is owlegie.' 'Owlegie' was his diminutive of owl: 'His eye had instantly caught the similarity between the round felt disc of the hammer divided by a piece of wood, and the owl's face divided by its beak.' So metaphor is both childish and true. Another child, seeing dew on the

grass, says 'the grass is crying'. Jean Ingelow, a poet of childhood, recalled her own state of mind when, during her third year:

'I had the habit of attributing intelligence not only to all living creatures, the same amount and kind of intelligence that I had myself, but even stones and manufactured articles. I used to feel how dull it must be for the pebbles in the causeway to be obliged to lie still and only see what was round about. When I walked out with a little basket for putting flowers in I used sometimes to pick up a pebble or two and carry them on to have a change: then at the farthest point of the walk turn them out, not doubting that they would be pleased to have a new view.'

When Francis Thompson wrote 'Look for me in the nurseries of heaven' he was giving expression to a sentiment more or less conscious in every adult. The child brings us into contact with the crystal springs of being, brings a brightness to the world-dulled mind, and so poet after poet exploring the depths of human experience has turned his back on more pretentious philosophies to praise childish things. Thompson was never less childish than when he wrote 'To My Godchild'. There is a great body of poetry written for the enjoyment of children or to express the poet's eager return to innocence, but little of Thompson's is of this kind. He is native to heaven in the sense that most of his poems are bright with childish vision. Although there is a varied and rich intellectual content in his poetry as a whole, the song is nearer to sanctity than to science; it is unsophisticated. The saint's communion with nature, as we have seen, is like the child's, and of course it is the background of

essential poetry. There is a naivety of perception in the most enduring poetry which is characteristic of the state of innocence. Throughout English poetry from Chaucer to the Sitwells it is a constantly finding the 'owlegie' equivalent of the piano hammers. So, much of Shakespeare is part of children's poetry by reason of this quality. It is perhaps significant that the most religious poetry is frequently childlike. There is perhaps a greater proportion of the poetry of the seventeenth century than of any other which can be classed as poetry of childhood, and the seventeenth century in England is pre-eminently the century of religious poetry. Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne, anticipate a great quantity of less poetic though often more pious verse for children. Vaughan's

My soul, there is a country  
Far beyond the stars,  
Where stands a winged sentry  
All skilful in the wars

shows us where later hymn writers found a model. The lonely splendour, as of an outcast child's dream of home, in

They are all gone into the world of light!

called for a genius like Blake to find again the visionary torch in a more sophisticated age. Traherne's vision, too:

How like an Angel came I down!  
How bright were all things here!  
When first among His works I did appear  
O how their Glory me did crown!  
The world resembled His *Eternity*,  
In which my soul did walk;  
And every thing that I did see  
Did with me talk.

But this, like Wordsworth's famous ode, is already tinged with the pale cast of mortality; the mind knows its separateness already.; Memory is, strictly speaking, an impurity in the vision. Eternity means always Now. The more childlike perception is in the Wordsworthian poetry of the rainbow or the daffodils. It is an immediacy of contact, which is beautifully philosophized in Ralph Hodgson's 'Song of Honour':

The everlasting pipe and flute  
Of wind and sea and bird and brute,  
And lips deaf men imagine mute  
In wood and stone and clay,

or in the less philosophical Walter de la Mare, whose playful poems are full of divine seriousness:

Seem to be smiling at me, he would,  
From his bush in the corner, of may,—  
Bony and ownerless, widowed and worn  
Knobble-kneed, lonely and gray;  
And over the grass would seem to pass  
'Neath the deep dark blue of the sky,  
Something much better than words between me  
And Nicholas Nye.

Essential poetry expresses an experience of the poet who touches the human centre of experience where child and man join hands in the universal communion.

No one then need expect to find that a mystical poet like Thompson reveals the childlike vision only in the poetry grouped in his Works as 'Poems on Children'. These approach childhood, sympathetically, and at moments with an exquisite tact, but they are concerned chiefly with only one child, the poet himself. They are not among his best work even. Beginning with 'Daisy' and concluding with 'Little

Jesus', this group is mainly the expression of Thompson's sentimental mood, which rarely intrudes elsewhere in his work. He is here taking a pathetic part in the feelings of childhood because he was, in spite of—perhaps one might say because of—the 'twenty withered years' bound emotionally to his own childhood. He does not seem always to be speaking in his own manner. In 'Daisy' we are certainly reminded of Wordsworth: in the penultimate stanza especially. It is as if Thompson was conscious that the theme was Wordsworthian. In 'The Poppy: to Monica' the emotional power saves him. Sentimentality also is lost in the fervour of imagination awakened. It is the unmistakable Thompson describing earth, summer, and the poppy's 'yawn of fire' and 'mouth wide-a-pout', and the vision is truly childlike. There is also the reflective poet here, speaking of Love's 'great Pentecostal tongue', 'the reaper man, and his reaper Time'. In 'Poppy', the finest of his 'Poems on Children', is heard the sonorous chanting voice that invades the mind's fastnesses with the glowing images it fashions. The poem seems to sing past us, bodeful of its yet young immortality.

One summer day when Sussex shimmered in a haze of sunshine the present writer visited the meadow-girt Christ's Hospital, near Horsham. In the Art School he was shown an uncompleted frieze, painted by a boy of fourteen who knew little of draughtsmanship, but appeared to be a poet-painter. The youthful artist had conjured up on the long stretch of canvas a sun-soaked country-side, in the foreground of which slow figures in shadowy hues of dream represented his vision. The vision had been found in Thompson





MONICA (LEI), AND SYLVIA (MADELINF) :  
THE MIFYNELL SISTERS OF 'SISILR SONGS'

first, and corroborated in the Sussex meadows. The boy's text, painted below the frieze, was:

The sleep-flower sways in the wheat its head,  
Heavy with dreams, as that with bread :  
The goodly grain and the sun-flushed sleeper  
The reaper reaps, and Time the reaper.

Sentimentality is scarcer in 'To Monica Thought Dying', which is beautiful in imagery and exquisite in sentiment. From the opening exclamation:

You, O the piteous you!

to the end of the second section, repeating the feverish babble of the sick child which to the poet's listening heart seems to be spoken by the iron tongue of Death, the tension of inevitable utterance is unbroken. But the third and final section allows the power to evaporate, and what was poignant becomes a sentimental expansion of what is already adequately said. 'The Making of Viola' has not the passionate strain of 'To Monica Thought Dying', but it is a rare triumph of poetic craft which would have been impossible without deep feeling. There is less feeling in 'To My God-child', where again the poet is not quite sure of himself, and wavers between seriousness and playful fancy. It is an address to a potential fellow poet rather than to a child. 'Little Jesus' has much more feeling for childhood, though it compares unfavourably with Crashaw's poetry of the Holy Child. It is sentimental, though most exquisite at moments, generally when it resembles Crashaw. The last couplet, which is pure Thompson, is worth all the rest:

And He will smile, that children's tongue  
Has not changed since Thou wast young!

With that vision in his heart, the poet was ripe for *Sister Songs*, the verse inspired by his contact with Monica and Madeline Meynell. *Sister Songs* contains his best poetry on childhood, not poetry of childhood. Crashaw on the prayer-book given to a young gentlewoman is recalled by such lines as the following:

Oh, keep still in thy train,  
After the years when others therefrom fade,  
This tiny, well-beloved maid!  
To whom the gate of my heart's fortalice,  
With all which in it is,  
And the shy self who doth therein immew him  
'Gainst what loud leaguerers battailously woo him,  
I bribed traitor to him,  
Set open for one kiss.

It is in no sense an imitation of Crashaw, but a use of similar imagery for a similar mood. Crashaw's prayer-book was to the recipient what the little maid was to Thompson, a 'divine assaulter' of the heart. Kissing the little maid the poet kisses the divine heart of Childhood. As in his mature vision of reality illumination is for him the uprush of song. The prescience of 'the law severe' that must cloud this young innocence is one with the intimation of mortality in 'The Hound of Heaven', the sense of the evanescence of beauty in its temporal forms to which his heart would cling for refreshment. But from the ashes of the paradisaical innocence shall spring the pain-wise song. He is aided in this favourite imagery by the theme that the child's mother is a poet, to him very close to his Mistress of Vision. The child's toying with ethereal strings is a forecast of poetry as well as the more general mirroring of heaven in innocence. The poet beautifully introduces imagery of nature to link these

conceptions: after likening the child's 'blind repetitions of high things' to

The murmurous gnats whose aimless hoverings  
Reveal song's summer in the air . . .

he says (and we recall his 'Cloud's Swan-Song'):

We feel the music moist upon this breeze,  
And hope the congregating poesies.

The *Sister Songs* contain the finest metaphysical poetry of nature ever written in English until Thompson himself produced still finer. Not only of Nature in the usual sense but of human nature:

And thou, bright girl, not long shalt thou repeat  
Idly the music from thy mother caught;  
Not vainly has she wrought,  
Not vainly from the cloudward-jetting turret  
Of her aerial mind for thy weak feet  
Let down the silken ladder of her thought . . .

Crashaw never combined more perfectly the homely image and the divine feeling, and it is noteworthy that the maternal image unites Thompson's best poetry of nature with poetry of childhood. The *Sister Songs* are quoted elsewhere in this study, and it is necessary to confine this chapter to general hints. The comparison of the imagery of *Sister Songs* with Shelley's 'Witch of Atlas', which also is metaphysical poetry of nature, brings out the quality already noted in Thompson's. Far more than Wordsworth, Thompson devotes natural imagery to the task of vesturing abstractions. The abstraction-loving Shelley often delights in imagery for its own sake, so that its significance depends at times only on the evocative quality of dream symbols. It is an essential

and distinguishing quality of Thompson's poetry that imagination is what Shelley meant by 'creative': it shapes forms of truth.

Thompson's poetry of childhood is in the 'Love in Dian's Lap' poems and 'The Hound of Heaven' as unmistakable in mood and sincerity as the most serious passages of *Sister Songs*. A very little alteration of terms would convert 'After Her Going' into a child's sense of loss separated from its mother, and the lover who feels that the beloved's soul is an enveloping heaven is in communion with innumerable lovers by this childlike feeling, which becomes in the poet's symmetrical theology eventually the relation between the soul and its Creator. To Thompson the relation between child and mother was an intuitive expression of the relation between the temporal and the eternal, and this is why he was able to express with such splendour the truths symbolized by the Christian theology. The poet, who in this as in more accidental events, like the music of the itinerant violinist in Storrington which set him writing the opening lines of the Ode to the Setting Sun, always drew from life the text of his poetry, was conscious of the source of his emotional power. In one of his notebooks he finds in the human relationship a simile of the mystical: 'The world wide desolation and terror of realizing that the Mother can lose you, or you her and your own abysmal loneliness and helplessness without her. It is like fearing yourself to be without God.'

The characteristic metaphor,

Ah! me!

How shall my mouth content it with mortality?

brings together emotionally the child's thirst for the

mother's breast and the soul's thirst for God. Behind such personal symbolism is a universe of symbolism for reality, rooted in the mind of Man. Blake said:

'The world of imagination is the world of eternity. It is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the vegetated body. This world of imagination is finite and eternal, whereas the world of generation is finite and temporal. There exist in that eternal world the eternal realities of everything which we see reflected in this vegetable glass of nature. All things are comprehended in the divine body of the Saviour, the true vine of eternity, the Human Imagination, who appeared to me coming to judgment . . . and throwing off the temporal that the eternal might be established.'

There are too many instances in Thompson's poetry of the desire for the shelter and deep peace of maternal love to be ignored in a serious account of his work. As an interesting article has already been published,<sup>1</sup> attempting to analyse the psychological basis of Thompson's poetry, there is the more reason for coming to grips with the question, and anticipating the deterministic explain-everything argument with a more comprehensive account of such things than the fledgling science can offer us. When the psychological implications have been noted we can go to Europe for the religious. The writer referred to quotes many instances of Thompson's allegorizing of the theme of pursuit. At least one of her examples seems to be quoted because it is misunderstood:

<sup>1</sup> 'Francis Thompson: A Psychoanalytical Study', by Ella Freeman Sharpe, *Br. J. of Med. Psychology*, Vol. V, Part IV.

How sweeter than bee-haunted dells  
 The blosmy blood of martyrs smells!  
 Who did upon the scaffold's bed,  
 The ceremonial steel between you, wed  
 With God's grave proxy, high and reverend Death;  
 Or felt upon your neck, sweetly,  
 (While the dull horde  
 Saw but the unrelenting cord)  
 The Bridegroom's arm, and that long kiss  
 That kissed away your breath, and claimed you His.

Miss Sharpe ends her quotation at this point, but the poet clearly shows in the succeeding lines that he is repeating the mystical argument that the pain of loss is the price of joyful possession, and the above lines, apart from the fact that they are Thompson rhetorical rather than Thompson lyrical, are a pastiche of the poetry of martyrs. The reminiscence of Crashaw's hymn to Saint Teresa in the last line does not justify the assumption that this passage shows the poet's 'erotic motive of the chase'. Thompson never writes pastiche when he feels deeply. But we are told, 'the erotic motive of the chase, the Pursuer under the guise of God, the Sun, and reverend Death is unmistakable. The poet is the pursued, the sufferer, the maker of sacrifice.' Some caution is necessary then in receiving examples of the poet's femininity, where, as in 'Laus Amara Doloris', he makes implicit in the rendering up of his songs 'all renderings that were', 'the mother and wife of her child, the maid of her virginity, the child of her mother's breast'. Our caution is justified when the writer continues: 'To me the most perfect expression of his feminity' is in 'Assumpta Maria'. If we had not his express confession that it was 'vamped from the service of our Lady', the fact would be just as clear. If such

liturgical and theological elements are not to be ignored when tracing a central motive in the poet's work, other poems inspired by his faith ought to be remembered, poems which weaken the argument for the purely personal strain. What becomes of the psychologist's theory if 'The Passion of Mary' is also taken as evidence? The Lady Mary's crown is bright with the sacrifice of incarnated God, and Death is an angel who

from this cold tomb  
Of life did roll the stone away;  
And He thou barest in thy womb  
Caught thee at last into the day,  
Before the living throne of Whom  
The Lights of Heaven burning pray.

What has become of the 'erotic motive of the chase'? The same question might be asked in reference to several of Thompson's poems, like 'Any Saint', in which the mystical knowledge of Death is expounded. In 'Assumpta Maria' there is an attempt to adapt a Patmorean conception of Eros to the Roman Catholic liturgy of the Assumption. The poet treats the soul, as all the mystics do, as the Bride of the Spirit, because it is the receiver of Love. In a wonderful series of statements he gathers up all the universal symbolism of the female half of creation, the heavening womb, the grove and garden, the life-streaming breast, the mystic mountain, the 'four Rivers' Fountain, the Hall or house, the cave of the sky, the virgin; and the converse imagery keeps pace for pace with it. The poet was certainly born to sing the divine Mary, but are we justified in saying that he is identifying himself with her, 'that he, the poet, is Mary the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven', in such singing as this?



I, the flesh-girt Paradises  
 Gardenered by the Adam new,  
 Daintied o'er with dear devices  
 Which He loveth, for He grew . . .

Even though he knows himself a 'conduit running wine of song'? The danger of such a method of criticism is made clearer when the psychologist says 'having established the poet's identification of himself with woman, one is led next to the fact that there are two types of women, under varying guises, with whom Thompson is at one. We might call them the Pagan and Christian types'; and then proceeds to quote 'Daphne', 'the river-god's daughter', as an example of the Pagan. Just as in 'Assumpta Maria' the artistic and religious purpose (always conscious in Thompson) is ignored by the psychologist, so here the employment of pagan mythology is not given any significance. There are many poems on Daphne which would give as good ground as Thompson's for saying that the poet is identifying himself with Pagan Woman. That is to say the truth indicated by such an analysis is largely a universal truth, and must be accordingly discounted in estimating the femininity of the poet. Thompson, in my view, was not so much abnormally feminine as childlike. The penultimate stanza of 'Daphne', in which the humanity of the poet himself appears as Apollo, while Daphne is human love, ought to be mentioned by the psychologist.

'We grasp the maiden, and clasp the laurel', is a fairly obvious text for Thompson's starved virility in the sexual life, but it contradicts the theory of his femininity. His heart of mortality is 'muffled', for his soul was, as he said of Shelley, 'encysted' in youth,

and his wrecked body and life 'throes' into that of a poet, self-contained and throwing out evergreen leaves. So, while finding suggestive hints in the same writer's further remarks, it may be observed, after reading these lines from 'The After Woman':

Where Christ is life, and you the way;  
When Egypt's spoils are Israel's right,  
And Day fulfils the married arms of Night,

that the poet is not himself 'The After Woman', though it is true that he found 'the reconciliation of the Pagan with the Christian woman was imperative'. Change 'He' into 'She' and the following statement is just: 'He became Mary, Mother of Christ, the Newer Eve, the After Woman, the Spouse of Christ, "to love her is to love the beauty of God's house".' But Thompson did not invent all this symbolism. It is the growth of centuries of religious experience, a flower of several civilizations. To regard the purely personal emotion as the sole shaping influence is to set an equal value on the little flame of an individual soul and the collective spiritual radiance of civilizations. It is necessary to set the personal interpretation against the background of art, then one may admit that Thompson's love poetry shows a static ecstasy rather than a dynamic ecstasy, and that it may be 'based upon infantile experience, not upon adult sexual maturity. The recurrence of such phrases as "enchanted movelessness", "passionless passion", "wild tranquillities" are frequent throughout the poems.' And they may be associated in the conscious mind, as the writer says, with 'two early child situations, both of which involves oneness with the mother, the first in time being pre-natal, the child in the womb, the other post-natal, the child at the breast. The

poem "The Mistress of Vision" has this quality of static ecstasy and the imagery of the poem . . . "Love Declared" recurs in it.'

The comparison is worth making. In 'The Mistress of Vision':

Secret was the garden;  
Set i' the pathless awe  
Where no star its breath can draw.  
Love that is its warden,  
Sits behind the fosse of death, Mine eyes saw not, and I saw.

In 'Love Declared':

Time's beating wing subsided, and the winds  
Caught up their breathing, and the world's great pulse  
Stayed in mid-throb, and the wild train of life  
Reeled by, and left us stranded on a hush.  
This moment is a statue unto Love  
Carved from a fair white silence.

Lo, he stands

Within us—are we not one now, one, one roof,  
His roof, and the partition of weak flesh  
Gone down before him, and no more for ever?—  
Stands like a bird new-lit; only, only  
Within our shaken hearts the air of passion,  
Cleft by his sudden coming, eddies still  
And whirs round his enchanted movelessness.  
A film of trance between two stirrings! Lo,  
It bursts; yet dream's snapped links cling round the limbs of waking. . . .

This is the most significant passage in a beautiful poem, and it justifies the psychologist's argument. But to confine the significance of this, or the significance of the above stanza of 'The Mistress of Vision' to its expression of the mysteriously beautiful symbolism of gestation, birth, and suckling is rather like finding nothing to note in a flower except the botanical facts about it. The meaning of poetry is not confined to physiological sources of emotion.

Moreover 'Love Declared' in the opening passage is one of the most beautiful descriptions in English poetry of the first contact of confessed lovers. Where psychological analysis is useful is in its unconscious and unintended affirmation of the profound wisdom of mystical symbolism, which makes the cycle of human life contain all the immensities of reality which the mind can conceive. The finest love poetry, and Thompson has few equals as a poet of love, makes mystical knowledge concrete. His faith provided him with the perfect mould for his poetry. The Catholic Church has gradually grown into its present shape, and the process has been similar to the creation of a work of art. It is a macrocosm containing the microcosmic soul of the individual artist, as a mother bears her child within her.

Mr. Eric Gill, the artist, writing on 'The Church and Art',<sup>1</sup> declared that the Catholic Church had been content with the rôle of a teacher of Faith and Morals; it had never formulated any deliberate æsthetic doctrine.

'As teacher of Faith and Morals her influence upon the practice of the arts was enormous while that teaching was accepted, but for definite æsthetic teaching she has not been responsible and, indeed, there was no need for such teaching from her, for nature itself is an infallible æsthetic guide and it was only necessary for the Church to maintain the Faith and Morals under the influence of which men might work. In effect she says: "Look after goodness and truth, and beauty will take care of itself."'

This is of course the converse of the artistic principle,

<sup>1</sup> *Blackfriars*, February, 1926.

look after beauty, and goodness and truth shall be added unto you. But Mr. Gill continues: 'The visible Church of Christ is herself a supreme work of art, and has made a splendid order (*splendor ordinis*), a thing of beauty, of the whole life of man whenever she has been victorious.'

## CHAPTER XIII

### BEDOUIN AND SPANISH ROMANCE

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*'As our blood labours to beget Spirits.'*—DONNE.

*'Bring back even the best age of Paganism, and you smite beauty on the cheek.'*—FRANCIS THOMPSON.

*'At those moments when love thinks it has attained to that which it has been searching for so long, the dynamism that impels it must be coming to a halt since this dynamism forbids it to be content with anything whatsoever.'*—EMMANUEL BERL.

IT is not an accident that the 'Arab Love-Song' is, with 'Love Declared', the most beautiful exception to the general truth that Thompson's finest poems are all explicitly in some degree religious poetry. As the term is used in an easily understandable sense there is no need to show that all poetry is in some degree religious. The distinguishing characteristic of Thompson's poetry is that it is an effluence of the spiritualizing poetry of Christianity, which as a counterblast to the psychoanalytic view will be traced back, very roughly, to its component elements. The earliest and most important of the pagan sources of European idealism is Arabian. If 'Love Declared' finds a place among Thompson's finest work because of the strong emotional motive which links it with much of his religious poetry, the 'Arab Love-Song' has a not less explicable source of inspiration. The oriental fervour of Thompson's imagery has already been remarked. It is a quality which, as we shall see, is richly woven into Christian ritual and symbolism. It has from time to time appeared in Western European poetry as a kind of romance loosely described as 'orientalism'. A contemporary and personal

acquaintance of Thompson, Wilfred Blunt, did his most valuable work in turning Arabian poetry into English. Thompson's song is the quintessence of the Arab poetry of love. Without feeling the touch of kindred wings from those old poets' flights of song as well as an accurate reading of modern Arabic scholarship he could not have given us that marvel of recreation. Every magical detail is a resurrection, even that image which 'turns both ways', 'the red pavilion of my heart', which also images the inside of the *hówdaj*.

'Arab Love', at least since Heine wrote, has become in Western Europe almost a synonym for romantic passion. In the vast Arabian deserts may be found the conditions of life which produced that spiritual blossoming of a primitive people represented by the pagan Arabian poetry. The Arab of 'The Ignorance'—the period before the coming of the prophet of Allah, lived as the desert-dwellers live to-day, by breeding horses, camels and sheep. But when Islam burst out over the neighbouring countries, the best of the Bedouins became city-dwellers in Syria, Persia and Egypt and the heyday of their poetry was over; but in the desert may be seen still the conditions which produced it. Little of the soil of Arabia has ever been moist enough to support permanent settlers by agriculture, and most of the streams and wells go dry during the scorching summer. Rain is seasonal, falling in most places in frequent showers between autumn and spring and carpeting the desolate wastes with brilliant green. The tribe rejoices in the ephemeral plenty: they can afford to leave the permanent wells which are their base during the hot season, and with their herds they go to the green

pastures and pleasant waters of the 'spring' camping grounds. Then is the time of social gathering, song, feast, laughter and love. The sweet, fierce, temporary matings of the sexes, of which the Arab pagan poets sing are then accomplished and when the relentless sun of summer drives back the tribes to their permanent water supply the time has come for many of those partings lamented in odes strangely resembling ancient Celtic literature in Ireland. The influence of the enveloping desert tinges all the savage Bedouin's poetry with a serious grandeur and a picturesque realism.

'In the open plain with its wild, parsimonious beauty, every bush and stone, every beetle and lizard, every rare track of jerboa, gazelle or ostrich on the sand, becomes of value and is remembered, it may be years afterwards, while the stones of the camp-fires stand black and deserted in testimony of the brief season of love. It is only at the time of the *râhla* or general moving of the camp that the tribe comes together, the men leading their flocks and herds and the women seated, each family in its *hówdaj* or curtained panier, on its tallest camel, and singing as they go. It is always a brilliant spectacle, and one that lives in memory, as the converging lines wind up the valleys at sunrise and over the crests of the hills to their new pastures. This is what Zohéyr so beautifully sings in his poem of the *Moállakât*. His Om-Aufa is the woman he has loved, who has borne him a son, and who is gone. She has left him of her own free will, perhaps by his own fault, perhaps by cruel circumstance, but he shall see her no more. Bedouin romance reaches no higher point than this.



The love does not touch him which has been loved in vain.<sup>1</sup>

Here is the opening of the fine Ode of Zohéyr, to which he refers:

Woe is me for 'Omni 'Aufa! woe for the tents of her  
lost on thy stony plain, Durráj, on thine Muthéllemi!  
In Rákmatéyn I found our dwelling, faint lines how desolate,  
tent-marks traced like the vein-tracings on the wrists of her.  
Large-eyed there the wild-kine pastured, white roes how fearlessly,  
leaped, their fawns beside them, startled—I in the midst of them.  
Twenty years abroad I wander. Lo, here I stand to-day,  
hardly know the remembered places, seek I how painfully.  
Here our hearth-stones stand, ay, blackened still with her cooking pots,  
here our tent-trench squarely graven, grooved here our camel-trough.  
Love, when my eyes behold thy dwelling, to it I call aloud:  
Blessed be thou, O house of pleasure, greeting and joy to thee.

Friend of my soul! Dost thou behold them? Say, are there maidens  
there,  
camel-borne, high in their howdahs, over the Jurthum spring?  
Say, are their curtains lined with scarlet, sanguine embroideries,  
veiling them from the eyes of all men, rose-tinted coverings?  
Slantwise up El Subáan they mounted—high set the pass of it.  
With them the new-born morning's beauty, fair-faced and fortunate.  
At the blink of dawn they rose and laded. Now, ere the sun is up,  
point they far to Wády Ras, straight as hand points to mouth.  
Joy! Sweet joy of joys! Fair visions, human in tenderness,  
dear to the human eye that truly sees them and understands!  
As the scarlet fringe of fénná seed-pods no lip hath browsed upon,  
So is the dye of their scarlet wool new-fringing the camping-grounds.  
And they came to the watering pool in the red rocks—blue-black the  
depths of it.  
And they planted the tent-poles, straight and fairly, firm for a  
dwelling-place.

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Blunt's Introduction to "The Seven Golden Odes of Pagan Arabia, known as the *Modllakdt*. Translated from the original Arabic by Lady Anne Blunt. Done into English Verse by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt."

They have left Kanáan on the far right hand—dark-crowned the crest of it.

How many foes in El Kanáan! And friends, too, ah, how many! But they came to El Subáan in their might, impetuous, beautiful, they in their howdahs of scarlet wool. O friend, dost thou look on them?

It is true however that in spite of the intensity of passion often revealed in the Arab poetry, love did not dominate the Bedouin mind. The reason is found in the social organization of this desert race, which at the time of the finest extant poems (dating from about 130 years before the Flight of the Prophet) had been a system of kindred groups, of which every member was bound to it more closely than to his own family. This was a survival of an ancient matriarchal system of female kinship originally including the primitive group marriage. In the classical age of Arabia vestiges of this tradition remained in the comparatively high social position of the free women in marriage, who could claim the protection of their own family and group as well as that of their husbands.<sup>1</sup> The outstanding feature of the tribal system however was the implacable law of revenge. No man within the group of the common kindred could escape from the responsibility of the blood feud against any member of the group to which the murderer belonged. Until the blood was atoned for either by the shedding of blood or by an agreed payment, there was war to the death between the two tribes. With regard to marriage no doubt the frequent union of a man and a woman belonging to different tribes was brought about by the seasonal migrations of the desert dwellers and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, by W. Robertson Smith.

their great gatherings in the spring pastures. The mere separation of one tribe from another would intensify the romance of marriage with the foreign wife, and the precarious nature of the bond would make the nuptial experience vivid in the memory of the wandering sheik. And the poet was a highly honoured member of the tribe, often a chief or princely warrior. According to a later writer, Ibn Rashîk, the Arabs 'used not to wish one another joy but for three things—the birth of a boy, the coming to light of a poet, and the foaling of a noble mare'.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the most eloquent passages of the 'Golden Odes' are descriptions of the poet's mare or camel. These 'Seven Golden Odes' known as the Moállakât are regarded as classics of Pagan Arabia, that of the earliest and perhaps the greatest, by Imr el Kais, dating about A.D. 545, the latest, by Zohéyr, a portion of which in Wilfred Blunt's fine version has just been quoted, belonging to about A.D. 605, less than twenty years after the preaching of Islam.

The Ode of Imr el Kais needs to be approached in a translation like Blunt's before its power and beauty can be felt without a knowledge of the original Arabic, and his version is a temptation to quote at a length which our space would not permit. It opens

Weep, ah weep love's losing, love's with its dwelling-place  
 set where the hills divide Dakhuli and Haumali.  
 Tudiha and Mikrat! There the hearth-stones of her  
 stand where the South and North winds cross-weave the sand-  
 furrows.

The poet describes the bitterness of a love-parting

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to Sir Charles Lyall's *Translations of Ancient Arabian Poetry, chiefly Pre-Islamic*.

and then seeks consolation in the sweetness of passionate memory. He tells of his loves in the glad days, they who belonged to youth. And then comes at more length an outstanding figure, and his verse presents an unforgettable picture of love in the desert:

Fair too was that other, she the veil-hidden one,  
 howdahed how close, how guarded. Yet did she welcome me.  
 Passed I twixt her tent ropes,—what though her near-of-kin  
 lay in the dark to slay me, blood-shedders all of them.  
 Came I at the midnight, hour when the Pleiades  
 showed as the links of seed-pearls binding the sky's girdle.  
 Stealing in, I stood there. She had cast off from her  
 every robe but one robe, all but her night-garment.  
 Tenderly she scolded! What is this stratagem?  
 Speak, on thine oath, thou mad one. Stark is thy lunacy.  
 Passed we out together, while she drew after us  
 on our twin track to hide it, wise, her embroideries,  
 Fled beyond the camp-lines. There in security  
 dark in the sand we lay down far from the prying eyes.  
 By her plaits I wooed her, drew her face near to me,  
 won to her waist how frail-lined, hers of the ancle-rings.  
 Fair-faced she—no redness—noble of countenance,  
 smooth as glass her bosom, bare with its necklaces.  
 Thus are pearls yet virgin, seen through the dark water,  
 clear in the sea-depths gleaming, pure, inaccessible  
 Coyly she withdraws her, shows a cheek, a lip,  
 she a gazelle of Wujra,—yearling the fawn with her.  
 Roe-like her throat slender, white as an ariels,  
 sleek to thy lips uplifted,—pearls are its ornament.  
 On her shoulders fallen thick are the locks of her,  
 dark as the dark date-clusters hung from the palm-branch  
 See the side-plaits pendent, high on the brows of her  
 tressed in a knot, the caught ones fast with the fallen ones.  
 Slim her waist,—a well-cord scarce has its slenderness.  
 Smooth are her legs as reed-stems stripped at a water-head.  
 The morn through she sleepeth, musk-strewn in indolence,  
 hardly at noon hath risen, girded her day dresses.

Soft her touch,—her fingers fluted as water-worms,  
 sleek as the snakes of Thoby, tooth-sticks of Ishali.  
 Lighteneth she night's darkness, ay, as an evening lamp  
 hung for a sign of guidance lone on a hermitage.  
 Who but shall desire her, seeing her standing thus,  
 half in her childhood's short frock, half in her woman's robe!  
 Strip thee of youth's fooling, thou in thy manhood's prime.  
 Yet to her love be faithful,—hold it a robe to thee.  
 Many tongues have spoken, warned me of craft in love.  
 Yet have they failed an answer,—all were thine enemies.

In the next passage the brooding night is likened to a slow camel, and yet, says the poet, the dawn will come all too soon to distress him. There follows a vivid account of his riding forth and a panegyric of its beauty, and then a description of a storm in the desert which has become famous.

The reference to the hermitage lamp shining across the evening twilight, written as it was before the coming of Mahomet, is very interesting as evidence that the early Christian hermits were a familiar feature of the Arabian deserts. Indeed there is a whole world of significance in the appearance of such an image in such a poem, the earliest extant example of a poetry that was to invade the literature of Christianity.

The 'Golden Odes' are but a small portion of the total poetic literature of Arabia. This is divided into two kinds, the Kasîdeh, or Ode, a rigidly conventional form, and the Kit'ah, or Fragment; they were nearer to Greek idyll and epigram respectively than to what we should describe as epic, narrative or dramatic poetry. But in spirit they are distinct, and in so far as they are love poetry nothing else like them appeared in Europe until the Moorish followers of Islam burst into Europe and left the Romanic poetry

behind them. An exception however should be made of the ancient pagan poetry of Celtic Ireland, which was almost contemporaneous though so widely separated geographically. Each of them, Blunt pointed out, 'lost its wild natural impulse through the very same circumstance of the conversion of its pagan bards to an overmastering new theology'. We shall see that the impulse did not die out any more than that of the Celtic twilight, but set new forces moving in European literature.

The strict rules of the Ode included the convention that except when the subject was extraordinarily solemn and elegiac, the poem should open with a reference to women and their shifting habitations. The poet after speaking of the pangs and blisses of love might then describe his mistress, from which he would go on to an eloquent description of his camel or his horse. By such stages only could he approach the main object of the Ode, which might be a panegyric of some loyalty or victory, or a picture of war, or revelry or travel, or an argument and a satire directed against enemies.

The beginning of one other famous Ode may be quoted here from Blunt's version. This is the Ode of Antara, who

'Has gained the widest celebrity, this less through the high merits of his verse, than for his exploits as a warrior and as the hero of the mediæval romance which bears his name. He was indeed the true prototype of the Knights Errant of our own Age of Chivalry, and like Charlemagne and King Arthur, has a legendary character.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wilfred Blunt: Introduction to 'The Seven Golden Odes'.

Antara's life was one of fighting and reprisals and he died in battle. He was the son of a chief by an Abyssinian slave woman, a circumstance which caused him to be regarded as illegitimate and inferior by the Bedouins and resulted in the refusal of the hand of his nobly born cousin 'Abla. But his prowess in war and the tribe's need of his strong arm ended finally in the appropriate reward of valour. His passion is recorded in the Ode, and the following passage probably refers to the time when he was still separated from 'Abla by a fierce quarrel with her kinsmen:

How many singers before me! Are there yet songs unsung?  
 Dost thou, my sad soul, remember where was her dwelling place?  
 Tents in Jiwá, the fair wádi, speak ye to me of her.  
 Fair house of 'Abla my true love, blessing and joy to thee!  
 Doubting I paused in the pastures, seeking her camel-tracks,  
 high on my swift-trotting naga tall as a citadel,  
 Weaving a dream of the past days, days when she dwelt in them,  
 'Abla, my true love, in Házzen, Sammán Mutathéllemi.  
 There on the sand lay the hearth-stones, black in their emptiness,  
 Desolate more for the loved ones fled with Om Héythami,  
 Fled to the land of the lions, roarers importunate.  
 Daily my quest of thee darkens, daughter of Mákhrami.  
 Truly at first sight I loved her, I who had slain her kin,  
 ay, by the life of thy father, not in inconstancy.  
 Love, thou hast taken possession. Deem it not otherwise.  
 Thou in my heart art the first one, first in nobility.  
 How shall I win to her people? Far in Anéyzateyn  
 feed they their flocks in the spring-time, we in the Gáilem.  
 Yet it was thou, my beloved, willed we should sunder thus,  
 bridled thyself the swift striders, black night encompassing.  
 Fear in my heart lay a captive, seeing their camel-herds  
 herded as waiting a burden, close to the tents of them,  
 Browsing on berries of Kimkhim, forty-two milch camels,  
 black as the underwing feathers set in a raven's wing.  
 Then it was 'Abla enslaved thee showing her tenderness,  
 white teeth with lips for the kissing. Sweet was the taste of them,  
 Sweet as the vials of odours sold by the musk sellers,  
 fragrant the white teeth she showed thee, fragrant the mouth of her.

Images of a fresh garden, sunlit rains, humming bees and running streams are suggested to the poet by the memory of the lips of love, and then he says:

Sweet, thou shalt rest till the morning all the night lightly there,  
 while I my red horse bestriding ride with the forayers.  
 Resting-place more than the saddle none have I, none than he  
 war-horse of might in the rib-bones—deep in the girth of him.

There follows a vivid description of his camel which will bear him to his beloved, and further pleading with her and excuses not far from boasts for his faults. Much of the long romance of Antara referred to by Blunt—one of the Oriental originals of the mediæval Christian romances—was translated into English in 1819 by Terrick Hamilton. Arab poetry penetrated mediæval Europe through the Moors. The Castilian muse showed clearly in the romances of the Cid the Moorish influence. But a favourite theme of the mediæval Spanish love poetry, the conflict between body and soul, or reason and passion, supplies a trace of the other main influence, that of Christianity. Like the Arabian poetry, however, it was always concerned with war as well as love, war implying heroic adventure of the individual. A typical poem, a sonnet by Mendoza, illustrates this:

Now by the Muses won, I seize my lyre;  
 Now roused by valour's stern and manly call,  
 I grasp my flaming sword, in storm and fire,  
 To plant our banner on some hostile wall.  
 Now sink my weary limbs to silent rest,  
 And now I wake and watch the lonely night;  
 But thy fair form is on my heart impressed.  
 Through every change, a vision of delight.  
 Where'er the glorious planet sheds his beams,  
 Whatever land his golden orb illumines,



Thy memory ever haunts my blissful dreams,  
 And a delightful Eden round me blooms.  
 Fresh radiance clothes the earth, the sea, and skies,  
 To mark the day that gave thee to mine eyes.<sup>1</sup>

This spirit of romantic love, the nucleus of individual as contrasted with collective or religious fantasy, is the hall-mark of Arabian chivalry. Through the Troubadours and the mystics, the religious and the secular, it was to feed a psychic need in Europe, becoming a permanent element of western literature when it reached Ronsard in France and Spenser in England. The influence of Pindar's Epinician Odes failed to weaken it in Ronsard, partly no doubt because Pindar belonged to the melic school and was no alien to the spirit of the Asiatic Greeks. In England not the full flood of renaissance enthusiasm for Plato could make the soil it found in Spenser and Sidney unfavourable to its blossoming everywhere in Elizabethan poetry.

In Spain the beautiful efflorescence of mysticism was imbued with the warm reflections of oriental romance; in the Spanish genius for religion as well as poetry it found its finest soil. A critical scholar like Professor Peers describes Spanish mysticism as 'intensely fervid, realistic and personal'.<sup>2</sup> It was as a matter of fact, not only in the greatest mystics, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and the spiritually Spanish Ramón Lull, but in a host of others, many of whom were translated into English in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the most poetic school of mysticism in Europe. The idealism of the Spaniards, developed through the long period

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Sismondi's *Literature of the South of Europe*. Translated by Thomas Roscoe, 1846. Vol. II.

<sup>2</sup> *Spanish Mysticism*, by E. Allison Peers.

of the Reconquest, was at the same time artistically conquered by the vanquished Moors. The inter-communication between the language of the *Romancero* and of Christian mysticism was inevitable, for religion and poetry were complementary expressions of the soul of a people at the edge of Europe. A few sentences of Ramón Lull on the relations between God and the soul will offer a typical expression of the favourite theme of the Spanish mystics:

'Said the Lover to his Beloved: "Thou art all, and through all, and in all, and with all. I would give Thee all of myself that I may have all of Thee, and Thou all of me."

'The Lover said to the people: "He who truly remembers my Beloved, in remembering Him forgets all things around."

'They said to the Lover: "Whither goest thou?" He answered, "I come from my Beloved." "Whence comest thou?" "I go to my Beloved." "When wilt thou return?" "I shall be with my Beloved."'<sup>1</sup>

This is the anticipation of the mysticism of the Golden Age in the sixteenth century, in which all the romantic imagery of war is freely used as our seventeenth-century poets use it; as Thompson uses it. Crashaw and Vaughan especially among the 'metaphysical' poets show traces of Spanish mysticism in their poetry. No more than such broad landmarks can be pointed to here. There is much ground to cover yet. The important point, which hardly receives enough prominence in histories of European literature and of Christianity, is that Arabian romance is the

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved.* (Peers.)

chief source of European romance, the language of which supplied imagery to the mystics. This Arabic influence is proved by documentary evidence to those who are not overwhelmed with conviction by contact with the poetic soul of Arabia. The case is therefore different from that of Asiatic influence in Homer and early Greek literature generally. Greek literature remained a dead letter after the break-up of the Roman Empire until the eve of the Renaissance, and so the emphasis falls first on the results of Western intercourse with the Saracens. But as we approach modern Europe, a peculiarity of the last of the great Athenian dramatists emerges, and this must be mentioned. Euripides, the most modern dramatist in all the classical literature of Europe, anticipated and stressed perhaps for the first time the conception of love as an ideal instead of merely a sensual delight. His *Alcestis* is a feminine character as fine as any of Shakespeare's women. What he made of Iphigenia reflected a society in which women were active and intelligent members. Generally such women in actual fact were not wives, but 'Companions', and doubtless the law of Pericles that citizenship could only be inherited when both parents were citizens (the *hetæra* being barred from citizenship), was one cause of the insistence of certain writers on the value of friendship in love. A very similar situation developed in Rome, where a whole class of women were treated legally with unfavourable discrimination as against the Roman wives and citizens. Marriage in the legal sense was forbidden with the 'Companion', however loyal the love and enduring the liaison. The result may be traced in much of the Roman love poetry and very clearly in the plays of Plautus. A development of this

legal restriction of marriage occurred in the Christian Church, ending, in the case of the clergy, in absolute prohibition and the substitution of concubines for wives. In pagan Rome, and at least in a section of the Church, perils and disasters of love became a constant theme of poetry and prayer. The ground was well prepared for the poetry of true love.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE SPIRITUALIZING OF LOVE

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*'Religion . . . begins as black magic; it ends as Pure Love.'*—E. UNDERHILL.

THE consideration of Thompson's psychic orientation led us inevitably to the Church within which he was himself a workman adding to its beauty. Though in his lifetime the man himself would scarcely have been considered an orthodox churchman, he was as a writer a capable champion of æsthetic Christianity against any revival of paganism. His essay on 'Paganism Old and New', although somewhat narrow in the argument, shows a penetrating sense of things that many intelligent critics of his time were inclined to overlook. To illustrate his contentions in that essay and to trace briefly the ground on which he stands while making his assertions will not be so wide a divagation as it appears superficially. 'But, after all, the most beautiful thing in love-poetry is Love. Now Love is the last thing any scholar will look for in ancient erotic poetry,' Thompson declared; and, 'Body differs not more from soul than the Amor of Catullus or Ovid differs from the Love of Dante or Shelley.'

The conclusion to chapter twelve was an attempt to explain briefly how Thompson the poet and Thompson the Catholic mystic could harmonize. What Mr. Gill claimed for the Church is the element which has been contributed by the seers, in art and religion—'Sanctity and Song'. Thompson's vision grows out of an ancient soil; it is rooted not only in scientific reality but in the European soul, which has been continuously evolved and refined by art

and religion. The oriental or 'Asiatic' element in Thompson's poetry is also an important element of the Church, which by the process of artistic creation absorbed life from many opposites and fused them into a new whole. The European idealism of love was born in the middle ages as a result of the junction of Christian and Saracen conceptions. Western civilization is the spiritual child of mediævalism, which included pagan elements. The pagan renaissance became the foster-parent of a child already sturdy. The poetry of love which grew from the new spiritual condition of Europe is a refining influence, which in literature might perhaps be called feminine. The most primitive, pre-Christian literature is mainly concerned with other themes than love. Homer's Penelope, often quoted as a high ideal of womanhood, stands for the ideal wife in the patriarchal community, but hardly proves the existence of an ideal of love. The hero's dalliance with Circe is not contrasted (except to our modern minds) with the radiance of that steadfast lamp of affection. The poetry of true love is seen to lack the erotic equality of the sexes. So soon as this emerges, as it did in Christian European literature, finer emotional vibrations stir the poets, a new tenderness suffuses poetry: the moral allegories and the proverbs, the songs of battle and beer, the sagas of magic and adventure in Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian literature are transformed.

'Then' as Lord Lytton wrote 'the Cymrian bards tune their harps to light airs never known to the Druids; the amorous Court of King Arthur supersedes the myths of Hu-Gadarn and the hazy traditions

of Defrobani; and, towards the close of the thirteenth century, Dafydab-Gwylim gives an Ovid to Wales. Then the Anglo-Saxon transfers his metaphysical tendency for mystic Allegory to the refining subtleties and dainty conceits which are bred from Fancy when it broods on Passion. Then, in our northern provinces where . . . the population was almost wholly of Danish origin, sprang up the Border Minstrelsy, in which the hardy Scandinavian genius yields, though not without retaining the honours of war, to its soft invader. In the legends of Scandinavia proper, Love also begins to assume a more mild and benignant aspect than he did under the auspices of the earlier Freya.'

Love poetry sounds a new scale of emotions. A spiritual impulse from religion is attached to secular literature. The sexual impulse is no longer just a natural function or only a fearful force. It becomes the chief creator of beauty. There must be mystery and a hint of infinity in beauty; therefore the supernatural element in religion is not rejected but flows into the secular version of love and transfigures it. The finer sensitiveness brought into literature is explained by the peculiarly personal quality and universal nature of erotic feeling. The poet whose heart vibrates with love awakens chords of a finer music in others; his experience has a mystical significance. We have now traced in outline the growth of Christian love through the two channels which, as Thompson knew, intercommunicate, of sanctity and song.

Man's paradises have been the creation of internal activity of his mind as it contemplated experience and

slowly unfolded the sheaths of infinite mystery in existence. On the more external and practical plane ritual, a kind of poetry in action, evolves song and a new language of emotion. Singing accompanied dancing before the altar in all the Aryan races, and with the Greeks the progression from ritual to poetry is traceable in their literature. One half of Greek poetry was Asiatic, and is typical of the Arabic romantic element which was to merge with European civilization. The two main schools, the Doric and the Lesbian, emerged before Greek poetry had entered upon its decline. The melic poetry of the Lesbian school was personal, individual, and the lyric was actually sung to music by the poet. The Dorian lyric poetry was choral and social, and would be chanted in time to dancing at a religious ceremony. The piece could be described as a hymn in contrast to the more secular melic song. Thus the Paean to Apollo and the Dithyramb to Dionysus represent the type of Dorian lyric, while a Hymeneal song and the Epithalamion, were distinctly melic. But the Scolion, which might deal with a variety of themes from love to politics, and was a sort of banquet song, became the commonest example of the secular melic poetry. This secular and individual poetry of the Lesbian school, although it must have originated in a very ancient kind of folk-song, was hardly recognized artistically until the Dorian epic and drama had lost social importance with the disintegration of Greek religion. Wine and love soon proved their poetic value with the rise of melic poetry, and the immortal anthology made by Meleager from 500 years of Lesbian poetry is mainly about love, wine and death, while flowers perfume and colour the lyric, from Sappho (600 B.C.) to Meleager



(100 B.C.) who both found in flowers a symbolism for the human passions. There is no need at this time of day to expatiate upon the influence of Sappho's love poetry in Europe, but one eulogistic sentence by F. T. Palgrave is particularly illuminating: 'Sappho is truly pictorial in the ancient sense: the image always simply presented: the sentiment left to our sensibility.' In other words, it is in that class of poetry, closely related to dreaming, which is called 'magical'. One translation by J. Addington Symonds of her most famous extant ode may be quoted, since the character of this conflagration and transubstantiation of passion has a mystical import. Psychologically this 'love-trance' is similar to the day-dream intensified to a neurotic degree where imagination produces physiological activity. It is also nearly paralleled in the more erotic religious visions which were a familiar feature of mediæval mysticism.

Peer of gods he seemeth to me, the blissful  
 Man who sits and gazes at thee before him,  
 Close beside thee sits, and in silence hears thee silverly speaking,  
 Laughing love's low laughter. Oh this, this only  
 Stirs the troubled heart in my breast to tremble!  
 For should I but see thee a little moment,  
     Straight is my voice hushed;  
 Yea, my tongue is broken, and through and through me  
 'Neath the flesh impalpable fire runs tingling;  
 Nothing see my eyes, and a noise of roaring  
     Waves in my ear sounds;  
 Sweat runs down in rivers, a tremor seizes  
 All my limbs, and paler than grass in autumn,  
 Caught by pains of menacing death, I falter,  
     Lost in the love-trance.

The raptures of 'undaunted daughters of desire'  
 like Saint Teresa have a certain bond of affinity with

such excess of frankly sexual love, an affinity which needs only to be mentioned to be recognized. But there is all the difference between life and death in the spiritual goal of a Saint Teresa and a Sappho. The death-dream is often related closely to the dream of Paradise, which looks like its opposite, but consists of a reaction from the vain effort to find emotional security in the external world. In spiritual values the love of the flesh and the love of 'God' actually differ widely in results, both individually and socially.

The specially interesting feature of the Lesbian poetry, which seems so modern, is that it was distinctly Asiatic in spirit, although imbued with the Greek culture. Nearly all the best melic poets were Asiatic Greeks, and Meleager, one of the greatest and latest of them, whose *Anthology* was the poetic soul of the Alexandrian school, gave the final touch of romance to Greek poetry at a time when Rome was absorbing and transforming Greek literature. This new atmosphere, belonging to Asia Minor and Syria, excepting the fever and weariness was identical with that of Arabian poetry. This is seen by comparing some of Meleager's songs with certain of the old and genuine lyrics in the 'Arabian Nights'. Mr. J. W. Mackail<sup>1</sup> very pertinently asks us to compare with Meleager's Lament for Heliodora<sup>2</sup> such a piece as the following from Lane's version of the 'Nights'.

I have lost my existence among mankind since  
 Your absence, for my heart loveth none but you.  
 Take my body then in mercy to the place where  
 You are laid, and there bury me by your side.  
 And if at my grave you utter my name, the moaning of my  
 Bones shall answer to your call.

<sup>1</sup> *Lectures on Poetry*, by J. W. Mackail.

<sup>2</sup> *Anthology*, Pal. vii. 476.

and again this:

You made a covenant with me that you would remain faithful;  
 But when you had gained possession of my heart you deceived me.  
 I conjure you by Allah, if I die, that you write  
 Upon my tombstone, *This was a slave of love:*  
 That perchance some mourner who hath felt the same flame  
 May pass by the lover's grave and pity her.

In Mr. Mackail's words,

'Nearly every single phrase here may be matched from Meleager's epigrams. "We swore, he to love me, and I never to leave him; but now he says that such vows are in running water." "When I am dead, I pray thee lay me under earth and write above, *Love's gift to Death*: 'I will leave letters uttering this voice, *Look, stranger, on Love's murdered man*'; Even myself I carry the wounds of Love and shed tears over thy tears.'" ' <sup>1</sup>

Meleager may thus be regarded as the link between Asiatic and European poetry. He was born in the Syrian town Gadara, and lived a life of pleasure and song at Tyre until after the death of Heliodora, who evoked his sincerest poems. Then he retired to the island of Cos, where he made the earliest recorded anthology of poetry, the Palatine Anthology, a garland made from the melic poetry of five hundred flowering years.

In his later work he is, with one unimportant exception,<sup>2</sup> the first Greek to devote poems to the honouring of women. Although he seems not to know the meaning of fidelity in love—except as a desirable attribute of the opposite sex—there is a genuine note

<sup>1</sup> *Id.*, Pal. v. 8, 215; xii. 72, 74.

<sup>2</sup> Antimachus of Colophon, whose work is nearly all lost.

of affection in the epigrams to women, especially to Zenophilia, while his passion for Heliodora attained to the nobility of absorbing grief when she died. One piece in particular leaves no doubt that a new poetry of love was being born: the new spirit is evident in the following eloquent translation: <sup>1</sup>

I give tears, poor tears, all that is left my love, to  
You, Heliodora, in Hades under the earth. On your tear-wet grave  
I lay the memory of our passion, the memory of our affection.

Bitterly, ah bitterly, Meleager mourns his dear one  
Among the dead, her loveliness useless in Acheron.

Ah, where is my beloved olive-shoot? Broken, broken by  
Death! Dust stains the lovely flower.

Earth, Mother of all, I beseech you as a mother, hold  
Gently to your bosom one so bitterly wept.

But the majority of Meleager's love songs, and indeed, a big proportion of the Greek *scolia* devoted to love, from Sappho downwards, show an inclination to perversity, frenzy and complete moral chaos. If Meleager could write so finely of Heliodora, nevertheless he more commonly strikes the note of this epigram:

"The sharp wave of Love, the sleepless winds of  
Jealousy, the tempestuous sea of revels—whither am  
I carried? The rudder of my reason has been let go.  
Shall I see the voluptuous Scylla again?"

And as Cyprian Sappho inspired the Roman Catullus, so Syrian Meleager anticipates the frenzied Roman Petronius Arbiter. To use a hard-worked and modern phrase, the Greek melic poetry had become the poetry of a decadence. The same frenzy and weariness of love can be found in Western European poetry of the early nineteenth century. But

<sup>1</sup> By Richard Aldington.

nineteenth-century European literature was a product of pre-renaissance mediæval romance much more than of Greece or Rome.

On this point Mr. Mackail makes some pointed observations:

'Between the disappearance of the Classical or Græco-Roman tradition and the new birth which it took in the earlier Middle Ages, European poetry ran underground. But during that period in its progress it was subjected to many influences which profoundly modified it. It sank one thing and rose again another. Among these influences the most important perhaps, as it is the most subtle in its effect and the most obscure in its working, was that of Arabian art, of the imaginative interpretation of life given by an Asiatic race. The obscurity of that influence is at once the cause and the effect of the fact that insufficient attention has hitherto been paid to it by historians of literature and interpretative critics of poetry. But though obscure, it is vital. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

One of the links was Meleager's influence upon the Alexandrian school, which 'so immense in its influence as well as in its actual product', was, says Mr. Mackail, 'from first to last not wholly Greek, not wholly European; the ambiguous position which Egypt has always occupied in history is reflected in the composite flowerage of the poetry which takes its name from the Egyptian capital. From its beginnings in the reign of Ptolemy II until its final disappearance about the beginning of the sixth century A.D. a time almost within sight of the Arab conquest, that school was more or less continuous.'

<sup>1</sup> J. W. Mackail, *op. cit.*

The Asiatic influence which was to come from Arabian literature into Europe was embodied primarily in a fresh poetry of love. This new element in literature was the expression partly of ideas gained in the Crusades against the Saracens. The Crusades prepared the mind of Europe for the romance of chivalry which the Arab conquests were spreading from the Syro-Arabian plateau to Persia in the East and to Spain in the West. The popularity of a romantic poetry essentially pagan in spirit was apparently a result of two new puritanisms, that of Christianity and that of Islam. As we shall see, the essential Arab poetry was pagan and pre-Islamic, and so were the best of the 'Arabian Nights' stories. They conquered the mind of Christianized Europe far more effectively than the warriors of Islam conquered the European principalities and powers. The finest myth given to the world by the Roman civilization, the story of Cupid and Psyche in 'The Golden Ass', was derived from Asiatic fable, and its author was African. Terence, in whose plays the spiritualizing of sexual love goes farthest in Roman literature, was a wholesale borrower from Greek poetry, and Greek poetry was half Asiatic, particularly Greek love poetry.

The compass of this survey will not admit a detailed account of the descent of Roman love poetry from Ovid, Tibullus and Propertius, and its rapid sinking into weary debauchery. At its best it was not comparable with Christian Love poetry.<sup>1</sup> The fact has

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Thompson, 'Paganism Old and New': 'Body differs not more from soul than the Amor of Catullus or Ovid differs from the Love of Dante or Shelley.' He is essentially right, though perhaps body does not differ from soul quite so much as he implies.

merely to be recorded that literature in Europe would have died out but for the revival of Judaic religious poetry in the hands of the Christian Church and the fresh infusion of Arabian chivalry and romance.

'To Dante and Petrarch, as to the whole age of their contemporaries and predecessors, Homer was a sealed book. But the knowledge of Arabic literature was for several centuries before them widely diffused in the countries bordering the Western Mediterranean.' <sup>1</sup>

The influence of Judaic literature was strengthened by the Christian Church in the adoption of the 'Song of Songs' as a sacred hymn. Regarding the Arabian influence, it may be observed that through Castilian and Provençal romance a continuous path has been traced from Arabia and the Saracens into Spanish, Italian, French and English literature. To trace this path all the way would involve the writing of a history of the greater part of European literature. A few landmarks have been indicated in the account of Arabic poetry, which includes the most important anticipation of Christian Love poetry.

Turning to the poetic imagery of love the most striking conception we discover is the double character of Woman. The duality in the Christian Mary and Mary Magdalene is like an artistic masterpiece based upon earlier models. Its immediate precursor was the Roman Juno and Venus, an incomparably cruder, lower, less potent source of spiritual energy. In the middle ages the two Marys constituted a symbol of immense importance. It summarized the conflict of inner and outer life, of soul and body, love and lust

<sup>1</sup> J. W. Mackail, *op. cit.*

which the Christian spiritual freedom and sensual suppression had set up in the pagan heart of society. It also put the seal upon an important change in morality which had already been marked by the Syrian-Greek Meleager's adoption of the cherub in place of the fair youth as a personification of Cupid. The Greek morality of the time of Plato put the affection of man for man higher than that of man for woman. This was no mere sentimental convention, a simple idealization of friendship; it went deeper and indicated a different ideal. It had a counterpart in the Sapphic morality known as Lesbianism. Probably the cause of this phenomenon can be found in the Greek geographical and historical situation between Asia and Europe and the ancient and modern world. The Greek marriage laws and customs left little scope for the development of the finer emotions of love, but the intense civilization of the Greek community and the sudden emancipation from superstitious fears, produced an adventurous experimental morality together with a much augmented need for emotional refinement and aspiration. Circumstances merely guided the idealizing activity of the Greek spirit into a moral channel which was abandoned with the coming of Christianity.

That the Virgin Mother was foreshadowed in pagan conceptions only serves to explain why it proved so acceptable to the traditional, collective memory. Mary Magdalene was the necessary concession to Aphrodite—Venus; a concession, but at the same time a refinement. The Saracenic idea of chivalry was bound to find in the psychology of Europe a receptive and fertile soil. The paradox of the Crusades was a perfect expression of the conflict going on in the soul



of Europe. Chivalry came from the Arabs and found expression in crusades against them.

We must beware of confusing the spirit of chivalry with the modern idea of it. Chivalry was the outward expression of the Church's inner civilizing influence. It cannot be condemned on feminist grounds without a profound misconception of its nature. It had nothing to do with Platonism on the one hand or with the depreciation of woman on the other. It was rather a counterweight to the ecclesiastical fear and distrust of woman (so clearly paralleled in Islam), which followed the Pauline teachings. The fundamental misconception of the part played by chivalry is concisely expressed as follows by J. A. Symonds in his *Study of Walt Whitman*:

'Whitman abandoned those dregs of mediæval sentimentalism and platonism, which, filtering through the middle-class minds of an unchivalrous modern age, have resulted in commonplace notions about "the weaker and fairer sex", "woman's mission to console and elevate", "the protection by the stronger of the frailer", "the feminine ornament of our homes"—notions and phrases which the active-minded and able-bodied woman of the present day repudiates and from the thralldom of which she is rapidly working out her way toward freedom.'

Not to be ambiguous, this is mainly nonsense. The 'thralldom' of woman so often heard about is a modern, economic version of the pagan Greek and Roman patriarchal idea of the relation of the sexes. Chivalry was the external expression of a religious spiritualization of love. The service of woman was an ideal which helped to divert into a civilizing channel

energy which hitherto had been squandered in primitive ritual like that of the Eleusinian or confined to the ideal of masculine friendship. Chivalry was the poetry of mediæval religion. Its outward manifestation in Courts of Love and Crusades reflected precisely the degree in which the Church, in spite of its Judaic literature, was by itself at first inadequate to replace the ancient paganism in the soul of Europe. Both chivalry and the Church contributed to the new orientation of spiritual energy. In this momentous development Mary the Virgin Mother was an idea of incalculable spiritual power, the very *raison d'être* of the Holy Grail, the Sacred Cup, as well as the nucleus for the new conception (afterwards rejected for a time) of woman as the spiritual equal of man. Without such a dynamic idea the Christian Church could not have thrown so great an emphasis upon the life of the affections while it depreciated the sensual life of man, and also confronted a severely patriarchal civilization with the spiritual residue of an older matriarchal society. It is quite conceivable that if the Fathers of the Church had not become obsessed with fear of the female through ascetic repression of sex, the symbol of Christianity might have been the Cup of the Holy Grail. This repression and conflict within the Church threw the erotic impulse towards the ideal of chivalry, and so gave the new religion of love its necessary secular side. Love was thus made 'God', the centre of aspiration, the nucleus of the whole personality, instead of a 'natural' function for promoting fertility, coupled with demonic frenzies and horror. The service of woman was simply a poetic version of the service of God.

The highest expression in poetry of the new romance

of love was to come from Italian literature, because the Latins of Italy were closer than any other people in Europe to the centre of conflict between paganism and Christianity. The warm humanity of Chaucer and the mordant regrets of Villon were each derived from this new hybrid culture of the south. If we would see modern love at its birth, we must go to the gay seriousness of Boccaccio, the all-consuming passion of Dante. In the sublime spiritual triumph of Dante is gathered together the poetic future of a civilization. It is no accident that the mediæval Faust's spiritual career, when Goethe's mind gives him new life five centuries later, should have so many points of resemblance with the pilgrimage of Dante and the Christian mythology. Gretchen, Helen and Mater Gloriosa; Eve; Aphrodite and Mater Creatoria; the sequence is in the path followed by Dante in pursuit of Beatrice. Beatrice herself in Paradise is at last replaced in the Beatific Vision by the Holy Virgin. And at Mary's feet sits Eve—'she that opened the wound which Mary closed'. Then comes the final ecstasy of Dante's glimpse of God, the 'Primum Mobile'. Here words and thoughts fail him. There is only the intolerable intensity of consciousness for him to record; but he concludes his pilgrimage to the Eternal Light by finding there the overwhelming love which is truly called God. 'Desire became absorbed in submission moving in as smooth unison as the particles of a wheel, with the Love that is the mover of the sun and stars.' This is the religion of love transferred into poetry. The Paradise of Dante marked the noblest triumph of poetry in its mighty travail with the old Adam.

God as Love enthroned by art and religion leaves all

subsequent variations in the relations of the sexes the character of merely minor readjustments to reality. It is possible to argue, and it has been argued, that this ascetic ideal of love is morbid: and that the author of the sonnets to Laura and the author of 'The New Life' and the 'Divine Comedy' were not conspicuously virtuous men. But their poetry reflects the dreaming part of the mind, the dynamic soul below the level of consciousness. Such work has always had a sort of prophetic character because it shapes and expresses aspirations shared more or less deeply, more or less unconsciously, by the society of which the poet is a member. Had the influence of love poetry in Europe been still more extensive and penetrating than it actually was, the unwholesome elements in ecclesiastical Christianity would never have produced those terrible unconscious revolts against the religion of love which led to massacre and persecution in the cause of the salvation of souls.

In the Church's temporary intensification of the reproach of inferiority, mental and moral, in woman, which had centuries of pagan tradition behind it, we may find an explanation of the morbid element in mediæval love poetry. A certain type of woman, well understood by the physiologist and the psychologist, was produced who would remain cold to the most ardent courtship. This frigidity might be absolute or, more commonly, due to a psychic state difficult to change, such as the atmosphere of the Church after the second century of its existence was well calculated to bring about. If this theory may be considered valid, it offers an explanation which has not been advanced hitherto for the hopelessly pleading attitude of so many mediæval poets towards their

ladies. The Lauras and the Beatrices, as products of their age and society, were passive, cold and obedient to parental instructions. Woe to the lover whose suit was rejected by pride or common sense or political animosity! But the very hopelessness of gaining the girl would enable the poet to make of her a goddess identical with his own inner self; the poet became an introvert, his heart consuming itself, and his imagination building up the compensatory spiritual paradise. Subsequently such an attitude would become conventionalized until every little warbler sang songs to some implacable snowy bosom and marble heart.

This explanation is only partial. The attitude of romantic melancholy has often set into cold convention, and the mediæval and modern European poets were much influenced by the older Latin poets; but there was a temperamental affinity, a common experience linking together poets like Catullus and his black-eyed Lesbia, Propertius and the married woman he addresses as Cynthia, the sonneteer of the dark lady, the Ronsard of 'Les Amours', the De Musset of 'Souvenir' and 'Les Nuits'. By these and numerous other sincere poets woman is charged with treachery to love and is eulogized in the same loving breath. The story of Creseide adapted in England first by Chaucer and then by Shakespeare was rooted in reality. It cannot be said that frigidity was the fault complained of by the poets of Lesbia, Cynthia, Cassandra Salviati, the dark lady, and George Sand. A certain temperamental difference between the sexes could alone account for the worst despairs of love. This difference may be summarized as the greater suggestibility of women to external influences, giving them an emotional

adaptability to a fresh environment not possessed by men, so that if they happen to be sensual and neurotic, and uninfluenced by a high contemporary standard of morality, they will cause more suffering to the opposite sex than they themselves sustain, men being psychically the more faithful to love's memory. Here is the motive for the pagan woman in poetry.

The erotic melancholy seen in the classical Bedouin poetry which so deeply influenced European literature has occasionally the same root as that of the Christian poetry of love. It is due to the sudden breaking of an emotional bond by the woman as often as to the separation caused by tribal migrations. The effect on poetry of this sexual differentiation must never be overlooked, as it might easily be, in any account of the formation of European idealism. Whatever variations result from subjective experience of the poet, there are permanent tendencies in love poetry which can be explained biologically instead of in the usual terms of the literary historian.

Love was nevertheless set on the throne of intellect by the geniuses of the middle ages, and the whole gamut of erotic emotions from Sappho to Dante, was alive in the soul of Europe when Shakespeare came with his vast mind and heart into the world. In the work of Shakespeare is resumed the passionate career of man from pagan sensuality to Christian idealism. The scale cannot be extended beyond sensual frenzy at one end and God as Love at the other, but innumerable intermediate notes are struck, infinitely diverse harmonies are ever being composed by those who make a lyre of language to sing the hungers and aspirations of the soul. The mass of mankind labours

along after these singing interpreters of the spirit of man. Moreover, Shakespeare, who has often been described as pagan, seems strangely close to the Christian poetry of mystical love in his most passionate verse. There is a feminine tenderness and submission in this lordly genius which gives a character to his poetry as mystical as the Hymn to St. Teresa, though the terms are secular.

O never say that I was false of heart,  
 Though absence seemed my flame to qualify,  
 As easy might I from myself depart  
 As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie;  
 That is my home of love: if I have ranged,  
 Like him that travels, I return again;  
 Just to the time, not with the time exchanged,  
 So that myself bring water for my stain.  
 Never believe, though in my nature reigned  
 All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood,  
 That it could so preposterously be stained,  
 To leave for nothing all thy sum of good;  
 For nothing this wide universe I call  
 Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all.

The enduring and the causing of pain are as frequent themes in secular love poetry as in religious. The feeling in many poems of Verhaeren is not unlike that of some mystical rhapsodies.

Et je t'aime d'autant que je te fais du mal  
 Et je souffre aussi, ma tant martyrisée,  
 Par tes regards et tes pensées.

And so, in a generalization of his experience:

Au fond de la torture, on voit des yeux sourire:  
 Nous sommes tous des Christs qui embrassons nos croix.

So deeply has the Christian symbolism penetrated the heart of Europe that it commutes man's very inhumanity to man into a redemptive power of creating beauty.



# APPENDIX I

## COMMENTARY ON 'THE MISTRESS OF VISION'

BY THE REV. JOHN O'CONNOR, S.T.P.

THE MISTRESS OF VISION, THE QUEEN OF POESY AND OF PARADISE,  
OUR LADY SAINT MARY

I. **H**IDDEN from the wise and prudent, and manifest only to little ones, was the second Eden, at the end of the trackless ways of God, beyond the highest possibilities of created Nature. The life of grace and glory, which is the sole real life of the spirit, our life here being but a certain prolixity in dying, reigns undisputed there, where there is no more death. But self must die before self can be transfigured by grace, and the body must die before the soul can be transfigured into glory. This is a song of things of the spirit, unseen by natural insight.

II. A miracle of profound variety I saw this Kingdom to be. In the Father's house there are many mansions. A ninefold ring of angels guard it since the beginning, and each of these is ever young and fresh, being immortal by nature and of simple essence which knows no slackness or wearying, as the emerald, green like the leaf, is unfading and unchanging, unlike the leaf. Those winged visitants who have seen this Kingdom in ecstasy, remain caught by its contemplation and their song is choked by the greatness of the theme. The vision of the saints on earth is by no means rare, but the song of the vision is, because words will not express the realities, nor can mortal ears take in the music.

III. The Lady whose sorrows are entirely glorious

and are all merit without expiation, the only sinless sufferer of our race, reigns hereby at the very centre of the Kingdom, and speaks to our hearts through the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries of the Rosary, singing to us of the land where the joys and sorrows of this life make one music with the glory to come. In the realm of grace, the land of Luthany, they make poesy who live it, and in this region Elenore they live and sing it all through a country which mortal feet have never explored, real but beyond our geography, the Paradise of God.

IV. Her song is so sweet that it pierces the soul to sadness, and so glad that it weeps for joy: and all through this our day (which is like a dream in the night) it makes heaven real to us, and open, and the vision does not forsake us, nor the fellowship of the angels.

V. The contemplation of Mary's sorrows was a safeguard and help to perfect purity, and since the pure in heart are blessed by the vision of God, so poesy itself took on colours of the sky, and delight became delight a thousandfold because it was pure. Love grew vast and flaming because it became the opposite of lust.

VI. As the moon is the mirror of the sun, Mary is the only full created reflection of the Sanctity of God. She is an easy way of seeing God—eyes can contemplate the moon which would fail with too much sun. We cannot worship God in one simple and continuous perfect act while we are here. Creatures, used aright, are revelations of God's love and perfection. They break into colour and clear—obscure the intolerable splendour of His Majesty. Mary is she in whom are gathered up the ends of everything,

both spirit and matter. She transcends the beauty of woman as that transcends all other sensuous beauty, since the ultimate analysis of female loveliness is the capacity for delight, and in this Mary is supreme, a vast abyss of selflessness. Even her body is light-some and radiant of God since of her the Word was made Flesh.

VII. The city hath no need of the sun by day nor of the moon by night, for the glory of God enlighteneth it, and the Lamb is the Lamp thereof. Mary's Son, from Him derives all the light of Paradise and of the Kingdom whether in Mary or the Saints. He is the full and adequate expression and revelation of God in terms of our nature. There cannot be a time or a condition in our nature in which Jesus Christ shall cease to be a sufficient manifestation. Modernism asserts the opposite and is in this regard essentially anti-Christ. The Incarnate Word is 'low and vibrant visible', because in the veil of our flesh He condescends to our level and lets His light enwrap us gently; and because by the vicissitudes or vibrations of life on earth endured by Him, He reveals otherwise unthinkable attributes of the Godhead. The heart of Christ is the censer burning to transmute all wills to that which is done in heaven, and all desires of the human heart to the incense smoke of prayer to God. Every beat of that heart is an outbreak of such golden fire, a swing of the thurible.

VIII. Ah me! How shall I bear to look with her eyes on what she has seen. She alone, without any mitigation of doubt or divided interest saw God, who is also her son, agonize and die in our nature. Those eyes have seen God die, and have realized all possible disaster of all creatures. So a saint tells us

that Satan himself would be forgiven if he could bring himself to ask for Mary's prayers, and another, how at Pentecost, she received the fullness of the Holy Ghost a second time for the mothering of all Christian Folk; and how from that hour she began to intercede without cessation for the whole church. Hence the meaning of her great apprenticeship to sorrow.

IX. The landscape painting, especially in atmospheric description, for which the poet is justly famed, is here used lightly as a metaphor of Mary's eyes. The poignant suggestion of cold dawns in level lands seen through unrefreshed eyes seem to recall Thompson's awakening on the Thames Embankment. In this poem the poor match-seller of Charing Cross offers illumination to all who will buy of him. Botticelli's Madonna of the Roses, and his Madonna of the Pomegranate seem to explain the poet's meaning exactly. The poet-painter par excellence did set himself to express the weight that lay on Mary's heart from the hour of Simeon's foreboding.

X. There is a peak of purity attainable on earth, but far above the world's high-water mark, and not common even among the heroes of Christianity. If you were fortunate enough to achieve this, then you could look beyond and discover a degree of lowliness and self-effacement known to those whose legend is cherished in the Lives of the Saints.

XI. More lowly than the ground is the habit of mind of those who are near to God. Holy fear possesses them; they take refuge in utter humbleness, so near and clear to them is God, so dreadful the sound of His ordinances, so tinglingly manifest His revelation.

XII. A music grander than literature would ensue if the supreme poet were also a perfect saint. So, heavenly Muse, let me borrow the majesty of simple realization since these things are too real for the language of dream. These things are far too sure that thou shouldst dream thereof lest they appear as things that seem.

XIII. Type and anti-type, figure and fulfilment make the rhythm of the Divine Epic. It rhymes not in words but in deeds. The drunkenness of Noah after his invention of wine prefigures the death of Jesus Christ after His institution of the Eucharist. He trod the wine-press alone. The double consecration of the Eucharist was made before His death on the Cross and not after His Resurrection because the Eucharistic Sacrifice was and is His solemn yielding Himself to death and His irrevocable self-immolation to the Cross. It is in fact an integral part of His passion so that the temporal death is an incident of the abiding Eucharistic death in which He standeth as though slain, Victim and Priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech. Noah, vintage, drunkenness, are simultaneous in the type; Christ, Chalice, Calvary, simultaneous in the fulfilment.

XIV. But does the vintage of worldly profit and pleasure prefigure nothing but loss and pain? Does the vine in its old age bear thorns instead of grapes? Yes, and our Lord declares the riches and pleasures of the earth to be thorns which choke and kill the soul, and the perverted will of man, prizing these things only, did minister thorn and spear not in figure merely, but in very deed, to the Son of Man. Is there no comfort, no way out of this dread necessity, then? Listen.

XV. Take keenly to heart the sufferings of Christ and make them your own. So you will experience that the pains of this life are not so much the death of temporal joys as the purchase-money of the eternal. Pain and sorrow, whether self-inflicted or sent by God, are the most perfect bond of union with the True Vine. No one can share with Christ unless he be a partner in Christ's death, either mystically through the sacraments, or physically through heroic endurance for the right, or in both ways. The vine of earthly pleasure becomes the spine, but the spine of penance becomes the vine. Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

XVI. How dare I sing these things that am so far from living them? It savours of impiety that I, without any wings of asceticism, should seem to use these high matters for lyric writing instead of lyric living. He that peers too close at majesty shall be blasted with the glory, and my heart fails baffled and blinded because my living is not high enough. Ah! for a heart less native to high heaven. . . . Or, for a will accipitrine to pursue!

XVII. But one thing remains quite true, that just as no man can be a saint who does not consider the sufferings of Christ and the sorrows of Mary, neither can any poet be supreme who quarrels with the burden of the world, for he must misread the universe. Neither can he save his soul. The cousinship of sanctity with poesy, and their inexhaustible analogies are probably the main thesis of Thompson's poetry. See especially 'A Judgment in Heaven'.

XVIII. There is only one ending in music, and only one thought which is unfailing inspiration to the race of man. That thought is Divine Hope,

clear descant on those chords of weeping which are the sounds most commonly drawn from the lyre of this life.

It sings the glory to come for souls who without that hope would find life intolerable. But the singer needs a sore apprenticeship. He must die to himself before his notes can ring true. He must go bodily over to that kingdom of grace where joy is innocent and pain is peaceful, the earthly Paradise—the only one possible.

XIX. I accept the conditions. I will live poesy as well as sing the kingdom. How shall I attain?

XX. You cannot get on to the way of attainment without first entering into yourself. Compunction, or piercing sorrow for sin, as distinct from the general desire of better things, is the first essential. The kingdom of God is within you. Take with you the memory of your failures and the sense of your shortcomings, and accept humiliations, for these are the precious material of lowliness. Learn to see this life as only a dream compared to the reality of life everlasting. Learn to have a supernatural motive even for your natural operations. Whether you eat or drink or whatsoever else you do, do all for the Glory of God. Learn to mourn—blessed are they that mourn—and prove by your own experience that sorrow for sin is a perennial well of joy. Cultivate the fear of God and you will have no other fear. Hope in God utterly, since there is no hope apart from Him. Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. Be exceedingly glad of grace and redemption, remembering that there is no disaster save the rejection of these gifts, and all the kingdoms of the earth will not make good their loss. Knock, and it shall be opened

unto you. Keep your attention fixed on the hard sayings of religion until you are rewarded with intuition and they yield up their secrets. Exercise faith until it becomes knowledge, for if you do not do so you will lose it. He that loseth his life shall find it. Cultivate detachment, holy poverty, since this enriches the soul.

XXI. Then you will find such insight into the riddle of the universe that self pales and dwindles and your soul's powers wax and thrive until you no longer judge by the sight of the eyes or the hearing of the ears. You have found at last the land of Luthany where life is essential poesy; you are a singer of the kingdom for your intuitions are unworldly.

XXII. But all this is self-inflicted pain—it is not the whole of Sanctity. I see that it is a living poesy but many have gone thus far and yet stopped short of song. How shall I use this to glorify my singing? When your eyes are become simple, euphrasied with tears, they see the hierarchy of creation manifest in one vision from the throne of God even to the bases of the pregnant ooze.

They see the startling cousinship of common things with the patens of bright gold which inlay the floors of heaven. God made the world to be a grassy road before your faltering feet, and the daisies in that grass are a reminder of the gold-tesserate floors of Jove, the universe tempested with gold schools of ponderous orbs. The Designer's hand is equally manifest in both, and from this you may gather that He does not measure in terms of great and small—the daisy is as much a masterpiece as the spherul scheme. Heights and humilities take hand in ordinal dance before the gaze of the spirit and you look somewhat through the eyes of God, seeing even the



place of pain in this great order, how it is a preserver and restorer of the balance. Nay more, you dare to expect it from God as a token of His acceptance of you, and since He chose it also for Himself you have it and prize it as a token of sonship. Now you are native to the Kingdom.

XXIII. So the love and contemplation of the Virgin Mother, the poetry of her most high destiny, and the sorrow which beset its earthly preparation, have been with me through my life. The harmony of her matchless graces has been the inspiration of my own music and has kept heaven real and open to me, and I sense the spring of Paradise amidst the wintry world.

XXIV. In the rash lustihood of his young powers he had shaken the pillaring hours and pulled his life upon him. His mangled youth lay dead beneath the heap. But the grace of Mary renewed his freshness and kept his imagination untainted until his soul flamed into sacred song at least, though his strength and his opportunities for laborious, dedicated life had been lost. (This raising the ghost of the rose was a semi-scientific semi-conjuring trick familiar to the eighteenth century.) Thompson is a mystical poet whose own soul is the supreme interest and the measure of all things to him. He did not read St. John of the Cross before a well-appointed breakfast in bed, but he read Blake and Æschylus when he was starving, he kept pure and refined among the outcast, and even his faults and misfortunes sprang from a better childishness than the sort he claims for Shelley. He was a child of Mary, and never quite let go that Mother's apron-strings.

XXV. It was the appeal of Mary's sorrows that I

could not withstand. She issues no commandments,—we do not serve her by the book—she reigns by sympathy and by the sole right of perfectness. So the wild things of the woodland understand her and she captures them for God.

XXVI. If I ever reject this inspiration, or if Mary should withdraw it, there is no poesy on earth, I fear, that can fill the void in me. I have exhausted my possibilities—I have used all the music I have ever known in hymning the Queen of Singers.

## APPENDIX II

A LETTER FROM ROBERT BROWNING  
TO THE EDITOR OF MERRY  
ENGLAND

*(The last paragraph did not refer to Thompson and is omitted here.)*

ASOLO, VENETE, ITALIA,  
Oct. 7, '89.

DEAR MR. MEYNELL,—  
I hardly know how to apologize to you, or explain to myself how there has occurred such a delay in doing what I had an impulse to do as soon as I read the very interesting papers written by Mr. — and so kindly brought under my notice by yourself. Both the vers and prose are indeed remarkable, even without the particulars concerning their author for which I am indebted to your goodness. It is altogether extraordinary that a young man so naturally gifted should need incitement to do justice to his conspicuous ability by endeavouring to emerge from so uncongenial a course of life as that which you describe. Surely the least-remunerating sort of 'literary life' would offer advantages such as are incompatible with the hardest of all struggles for existence—such as I take Mr —'s to be. Pray aprise him, if he cares to know it, that I shall have a confident expectation of his success if he will but extricate himself—as by a strenuous effort he may—from all that must now embarras him terribly: he can have no better adviser and helper than yourself—except himself if he listens to the inner voice. . . .

. ROBERT BROWNING.

*(This letter is reprinted by kind permission of Sir John Murray.)*

## APPENDIX III

### BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FIRST EDITIONS OF THOMPSON'S WORK

- Life and Labours of St. John Baptiste de la Salle.*  
Being the issue of *Merry England* for April, 1891.  
(Subsequently published in 1911 by Burns and  
Oates, with Preface by W. M.)
- The Child Set in the Midst, by Modern Poets.* Edited  
by Wilfrid Meynell, 1892. Leadenhall Press.  
Contains Thompson's 'Daisy', 'A Song of  
Youth and Age', and 'To My Godchild'. The  
first book containing any of Thompson's poetry.  
His first poem to appear in print was 'The  
Passion of Mary' in *Merry England* for April,  
1888.
- Poems.* 1893. Edition of 500, and an edition on  
vellum of 12. Elkin Mathews and John  
Lane. (Later editions by Burns and Oates also.)
- Songs Wing to Wing: an Offering to Two Sisters.*  
1895. Privately Printed. Same as *Sister  
Songs: an Offering to Two Sisters*, pp. 65.
- Sister Songs: an offering to Two Sisters.* 1895. Elkin  
Mathews and John Lane. (Later editions by  
Burns and Oates also.)
- St. Anthony of Padua*, by Father Leopold de Chérancé,  
1895, with poem by F. T. as Preface. 1895.  
Burns and Oates, and Westminster Press. Pp.  
vi + 223.
- New Poems.* 1897. Constable and Co. (First re-  
issue by Burns and Oates, 1907. Simultaneous  
first American edition, 1897, differs in detail.)
- Victorian Ode.* 1897. Privately Printed. (Two  
issues, one with imprint of Palace Court Press,  
one Westminster Press.)

- Health and Holiness: A Study of the Relations between Brother Ass, the Body, and his Rider, the Soul.* . . . With a Preface by the Rev. George Tyrrell, S.J. Pp. 80. 1905. Burns and Oates.
- Ode to the English Martyrs.* First separate edition, 1906. Burns and Oates.
- Selected Poems of Francis Thompson.* With a Biographical Note by W. M. Pp. xiv + 132. Methuen, and Burns and Oates. 1908. (This contained 'To Olivia', afterwards omitted.)
- The Hound of Heaven.* First separate edition, 1908. Burns and Oates. (It had been published in *Merry England*.) Pp. 15 (with a note by W. M.).
- Shelley.* An Essay. With an Introduction by the Rt. Honble. George Wyndham. 1909. Small and large paper editions. (Had been printed first in *Dublin Review*, July, 1908.)
- Life of St. Ignatius Loyola.* 1909. Edited by John Hungerford Pollen, S.J. With 100 illustrations by H. W. Brewer and others. Preface by W. M. Pp. 325. Burns and Oates. 1909.
- Eyes of Youth: a Book of Verse.* Foreword by G. K. Chesterton. (Contains four new poems by Thompson.) 1909. Herbert and Daniel.
- A Renegade Poet and Other Essays.* 1910. Boston, U.S.A.
- The Works of Francis Thompson.* Three volumes. Edited, with Prefaces by W. M., the poet's literary executor. 1913. Burns and Oates. (Twenty-five copies on India paper privately issued in one volume.)
- The Collected Poetry of Francis Thompson.* One volume. Hodder and Stoughton. Besides ordinary edi-

- tion, two editions de luxe, one containing facsimile of 'Hound of Heaven' manuscript. 1913.
- Life of Francis Thompson*, by Everard Meynell. 1913. Burns and Oates. New material by Thompson and photographs of his parents, casts of his face and hand, of the house where he was born, and portraits of the poet.
- Sir Leslie Stephen as a Biographer*. With a Bibliography and Chronology of Francis Thompson. Edited by Clement Shorter. Twenty copies privately printed. London, 1915. (The Bibliography is incorporated, with added details, and fresh items in the present list.)
- Who Goes There?* By the Author of 'Aunt Sarah and the War'. Includes 'This is My Beloved' by F. T. Burns and Oates. 1916.
- Uncollected Verses*. Privately printed by Clement Shorter. 1917. (20 copies.)
- The Mistress of Vision*, by Francis Thompson. Together with a Commentary by the Rev. John O'Connor, and with a Preface by Father Vincent McNabb. Pp. 23. Douglas Pepler, Ditchling, 1918. (The only separate edition of the poem.)
- Little Jesus*, written and illuminated by Edith Bertha Crapper. By Francis Thompson. Burns and Oates. 1920.
- A Golden Book of Francis Thompson*. Being extracts by John A. Hutton, D.D. Pp. 95. Hodder and Stoughton. 1926.

## TRANSLATIONS

- Francis Thompson*, by K. Rooker. 1913. Herbert and Daniel. (Contains translations of quoted

## APPENDIX IV

### SOME OF THE POET'S SECOND THOUGHTS

A FEW more of the alterations made by Thompson in MSS. and proofs may be considered critically interesting enough to quote. 'The Mistress of Vision', stanza XXIV, is altered from

Her tears made *molten music*,

to

Her tears made *dulcet fretting*,

a striking improvement effected at the eleventh hour in the proof.

In the MS. version of the poem, a page of which is shown in facsimile above (between pp. 64 and 65), are some interesting alterations. The final version is placed last in the following:

*sweet-pained* singing.

*sweet-panged* singing.

\* \* \*

Far in unseen ways

Vague as dreams recalled by noon.

Far in unseen ways

Vague as dreams recalled at noon.

Far in unseen ways

Vague as noon-remembered dreams

brawled the little rill of life. . . .

\* \* \*

Fuming clouds of golden  
  amber } fire

\* \* \*

When their sight to thee is sightless

Their living, death, their *day*, most lightless,

(*day* changed to *light*)

\* \* \*

And from out its mortal ruins the  
impurpurate phantom *rose*.

*groves.*

*blows.*

'Ode to the Setting Sun: Prelude' had—

The passionate strings of the throbbed harp begin,  
until the poet read his proofs and made it:

The heart-strings of the throbbing harp begin.

'Anthem of Earth: Proem' had

Tempested with gold schools of *wallowing* orbs,  
until the poet saw that his love of violent and sonorous  
imagery had betrayed him, and he altered *wallowing*  
to *ponderous*.

'To a Child' shows

Go with strange feet that serve me not,  
changed to

But go with unsubservient feet . . .



# INDEX

- ACADEMY*, 30 *et seq.*, 177  
*Adelphi*, 201  
 Adcock, St. J., 26  
 'After Her Going', 220  
 'After Woman, The', 103, 104, 105,  
     123, 225  
 Aldington, R., 251  
 'Anthem of Earth', 50, 58, 68, 73,  
     137, 151, 158-160, 161-2, 165, 183  
 'Any Saint', 67, 205-6, 223  
 'Arabian Nights', 249, 253  
 'Arab Love Song', 124, 229 *et seq.*  
 'Ardorous abandonment', 75-8, 101,  
     108, 119, 136-7, 147, 149, 175-6  
 Arnold, M., 45  
 'Asiatic' elements, 201, 236, 240,  
     242, 245 *et seq.*  
 'Assumpta Maria', 68, 103, 104,  
     105, 112, 222, 223, 224  
*Athenæum*, 33, 67  
 Augustine, St., 87, 145, 153-8, 160  
  
 BACON, F., 47  
 Baudelaire, 76  
 Beacock's, Mr., concordance, 61  
*Beata Mea Domina*, 57  
 Beatrice, 57, 258, 260  
 Beauty, 43, 48, 51 *et seq.*, 81, 131-3,  
     141, 153, 161, 163, 173, 189, 218,  
     225, 227-8  
 Belloc, H., 26  
 Bennett, A., 30  
 Bergson, 171-2  
 Biblical sources, 97, 103, 155, 167  
 Bion, 107  
*Blackfriars*, 227  
 Blair, R., 186  
 Blake, 214, 221  
 Blunt, W. S., 21, 23, 26, 33, 177,  
     194, 230 *et seq.*  
 Boceaccio, 258  
 Boehme, 208  
 Booth (S.A.), 36 *et seq.*  
 British Museum, 32, 106  
 Browne, Sir T., 47, 161 *et seq.*, 173  
 Browning, 58, 72, 130  
 'Bunyan in Light of Mod. Crit.', 39  
     *et seq.*  
 Butler, Sir W., 26  
 'By Reason of Thy Law', 73, 97, 98,  
     101, 103, 141  
  
 'CAPTAIN OF SONG, A', 88  
 Catholicism, 53, 54, 77, 97, 103, 105,  
     130 *et seq.*, 227-8, 244  
 Catullus, 244, 251, 260  
 Celtic spirit, 231, 237, 245-6  
 Champneys, B., 88  
 Chatterton, 54  
 Chaucer, 214, 258, 260  
 Chesterton, G. K., 53, 75  
 Child, Divine, 122, 217, 255  
 Child mind, 126, 133, 209, 211  
     *et seq.*  
*Child Set in the Midst*, 53  
 Chivalry, 240, 253-61  
 Christian and Pagan, 66, 76, 104-7,  
     140-4, 151, 166-7, 174, 200-1,  
     204-10, 220, 223-7, 229 *et seq.*,  
     244 *et seq.*  
 Christian hermits, 236  
 Christ's Hospital, 216  
 Claudel, P., 77, 279  
 Coleridge, S. T., 41, 50, 55-6, 75,  
     113  
 Collins, 184  
 Columella, 183, 188  
 'Companions', 242  
 Contemplation, 63  
 Coœ, 171  
 Cornford, Dr., 106  
 'Corymbus for Autumn', 190, 195  
 Cowley, 103, 112 *et seq.*  
 Cowper, 184

- Crashaw, 59, 75-7, 108 *et seq.*,  
125-6, 145, 151, 187, 217, 218,  
219, 222  
Criticism, 39 *et seq.*, 129 *et seq.*, 161  
Crusading spirit, 38, 43, 237, 253  
*et seq.*
- DAILY CHRONICLE*, 31  
'Daisy', 27, 53, 215, 216  
Dante, 49, 57, 142, 153, 174, 244,  
254, 258 *et seq.*  
'Daphne', 224  
Davidson, J., 90  
Davies, W. H., 186  
'Dazzling Darkness', 79, 163  
'Dead Cardinal, To the', 67, 169-70  
Death and Darkness, 79, 101, 151,  
153, 161 *et seq.*, 215  
De Bary, R., 104  
Decadence, 251-2  
De la Mare, W., 215  
De la Salle, 35, 38, 40  
Della Seta, A., 168  
De Musset, 260  
De Quincey, 25, 41, 150, 161  
De Vere, Aubrey, 26  
'Diamond Jubilee' ode, 53  
Diction, 60-4, 95, 98-9, 127, 150-1,  
161, 181, 185, 195  
Dionysiac, 78, 190, 247  
Donne, 49, 59, 75-6, 113, 145 *et*  
*seq.*, 161-3, 188, 201, 205  
Doric poetry, 242, 247 *et seq.*  
Doughty, C., 51  
'Dread of Height', 73, 97, 101, 110  
'Dream Tryst', 26  
*Dublin Review*, 129  
Dyer, J., 184-5
- ECKHART, MEISTER, 154  
Elizabethans, 55, 60-1, 75, 147, 149,  
153, 240  
Ellis, H., 171  
Emerson, 58  
Emotion, 45, 51, 75 *et seq.*, 216
- Eternity, 138 *et seq.*, 168-71, 215  
Eucken, 173  
Euripides, 242  
Eyes of women, 83-4, 115-17
- FACT, 51, 178 *et seq.*, 212-14  
'Fallen Yew, A', 56, 57  
Father, The, 79, 217  
Femininity, 23, 123, 224, 257, 262  
Freya, 246
- GARDEN SYMBOL, 79, 84-5,  
138 *et seq.*, 210  
Garvin, J. L., 68, 108  
Genius, 52, 73  
Gill, Eric, 227-8, 244  
God, 48-9, 204, 207, 208, 211, 258  
'Godchild, To My', 53, 213, 217  
Godwin, 130  
Goethe, 48, 151, 199, 201 *et seq.*,  
258  
'Golden Odes, The Seven', 232 *et*  
*seq.*  
Gray, 184  
Greek elements, 104-7, 140, 142,  
166-8, 188, 192, 236, 240, 242,  
247 *et seq.*
- HAMILTON, T., 239  
Harrison, J., 106  
'Health and Holiness', 35, 209  
Heine, 230  
Hellenism, *see* Greek  
Herbert, G., 108 *et seq.*, 214  
'Her Portrait', 58, 80  
Hind, C. L., 30  
Hodgson, R., 215  
Homer, 242, 245  
'Hound of Heaven, The', 26, 29, 52,  
68, 70-2, 79, 91, 101, 109, 118,  
130, 143, 153 *et seq.*, 175-6, 183,  
200, 218  
*Horae*, 97  
Hudson, W. H., 26  
Hügel, von, ix, 211  
Hugo, V., 76-7

- IGNATIUS (Donne's satire), 158  
 'Ignatius, St., Life of', 18, 35, 40  
 Imagery, 63, 65 *et seq.*, 70-1, 73, 81  
     *et seq.*, 119-21, 125 *et seq.*, 138,  
     146 *et seq.*, 197-9, 210  
 Imagery, ecclesiastical, 95-7, 137-8,  
     151-2  
 Imagination: and temperament, 19,  
     126, 135-6; food of, 21, 24, 26,  
     180; in prose, 34, 38, 41, 43, 47,  
     150-1, 161-3; and expression,  
     62 *et seq.*, 68, 81-2, 127-8, 133,  
     147, 194; pictorial, 76-7, 194-5,  
     212; metaphysical, 70-1, 76-7,  
     80, 91, 143, 146 *et seq.*, 180, 192,  
     197, 219  
 Immanence, 107, 204-7  
 'In Darkest England', 35, 40  
 Individualism, 36 *et seq.*, 107, 204-5  
 Ingelow, J., 213  
 'In Her Paths', 123  
 Intellect, 38 *et seq.*, 75, 100 *et seq.*,  
     172-3  
 Italianate influence, 57, 254
- JAMMES, F., 77, 78  
*John*, 97  
 Johnson, L., 26  
 Journalism, 46  
 'Judgment in Heaven, A', 56, 59, 79  
 'July Fugitive', 56  
 Jung, 179
- KANT, 173, 175  
 Keats, 68, 178, 187, 190, 195  
 Kernahan, C., 26  
 Kidson, J. E., 26  
 King, Mrs. H., and daughter, 24  
 Kipling, 59
- LAFORGUE, 76  
 Larbaud, V., 34  
 'Laus Amara Doloris', 73, 222  
 Le Gallienne, R., 31  
 Library, British Museum, 32, 106  
 Library, Guildhall, 27  
 Lesbian school, 247 *et seq.*  
 Life and Death, 171-6  
 'Lily of the King', 38  
 'Little Jesus', 217  
 Liturgy, 97, 103-4, 106-7, 223  
 Lodge, Sir O., 49  
 Longfellow, 171  
 'Lord's, At', 56  
 Love, 71, 79, 83, 92 *et seq.*, 104 *et*  
     *seq.*, 116, 124, 141 *et seq.*, 152  
     *et seq.*, 170, 175-6, 200, 216,  
     223, 227, 229 *et seq.*, 242-3, 244  
     *et seq.*  
 'Love, Arab', 124, 229 *et seq.*  
 'Love Declared', 124, 227, 229  
 Lucretius, 49, 184, 188, 197  
 Lull, Ramón, 240-1  
 Lytton, Lord, 94, 245
- MACAULAY, 38, 42-3  
 Mackail, J. W., 249 *et seq.*  
 McMaster, Mr., 25  
 Magic, 50 *et seq.*, 63 *et seq.*, 138, 195  
 'Making of Viola, The', 29, 62, 79,  
     100, 217  
 Mallarmé, 76, 183  
 Manchester, 22, 25  
 Manning, Cardinal, 26  
 Marlowe, 108, 184  
 Marys, the two, 57, 78 *et seq.*, 97,  
     114 *et seq.*, 122-3, 166, 223-6,  
     254 *et seq.*  
 'May Burden, A', 56  
 Meleager, 247 *et seq.*  
 Melic poetry, 240, 247 *et seq.*  
 Mendoza, 239  
 Meredith, 58, 151, 187  
*Merry England*, 18, 25-6, 28, 39, 52,  
     131, 132  
 'Metaphysical' poetry, 75, 77, 81,  
     118, 125 *et seq.*, 147 *et seq.*, 178  
     *et seq.*, 197 *et seq.*, 208, 219  
 Metre, 57, 67, 68, 71-3, 91, 97,  
     198

Meynell, Alice, 24, 27 *et seq.*, 31, 53,  
60, 61, 104, 177  
Meynell, Everard, 27, 103  
Meynell, Wilfrid, 27 *et seq.*, 33, 52,  
131, 177  
Middle Ages, 150-3, 166-8, 209,  
236, 237, 239, 252 *et seq.*  
Mills, J. S., 22  
Milton, 41, 51, 184  
'Mistress of Vision', 50, 69-72, 80,  
84-5, 114, 115, 130, 138, 140,  
143, 218, 226  
*Mœstitia Encomium*, 47, 151, 209  
Morris, W., 57  
Mother, The, 79 *et seq.*, 114 *et seq.*,  
220 *et seq.*  
Murray, G., 106  
Music, 48, 173-4  
Music, verbal, 35, 173, 182  
Mysteries, The, 104-7, 257  
Mystical thought, 48, 52, 69-70, 76,  
79, 100 *et seq.*, 109 *et seq.*, 118  
*et seq.*, 124, 131-2, 140 *et seq.*,  
146 *et seq.*, 163, 171-6, 188-9,  
204 *et seq.*, 211, 240-1  
  
'NARROW VESSEL, A', 24  
*Nation, The*, 61  
Nature, 48, 128-9, 138, 152, 174,  
178 *et seq.*, 197-9, 201-10, 230-2  
'Nature: Laud and Complaint', 73  
'Nature's Immortality', 35, 47  
*New Poems*, 50, 52, 56, 61, 68, 69,  
87  
'Night of Forebeing, From the', 63,  
73, 164-5  
'Nineteenth Century, The', 53  
  
O'CONNOR, DANIEL, 32  
'Orient Ode', 63-4, 73, 91 *et seq.*,  
162, 164, 197 *et seq.*  
'Orison-Tryst', 56, 58  
Ovid, 244, 253  
Owens College, 21, 29

PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN, *see*  
Christian  
'Paganism Old and New', 25 *et seq.*,  
142, 244  
Pain, 69-70, 79, 89, 139-42, 164-5,  
218, 255, 262  
Palgrave, F. T., 248  
Pantasaph, 24  
Pantheism, 204  
Paradise, 70, 79-85, 138 *et seq.*, 168,  
174, 223, 246, 258  
Parnell, T., 185  
'Passion of Mary, The', 52, 223  
'Past Thinking of Solomon', 56  
Pater, W., 162  
Patmore, C., 26, 29, 53, 64, 68, 73,  
87 *et seq.*, 154, 208  
Patmore, H., 20  
'Peace', 68  
Peele, G., 55  
Peers, A., 240-1  
Pericles, 242  
Personification, 184-5  
Petrarch, 167, 254  
Petronius, 251  
'Philistine', 44-6  
Pindar, 240  
Plato, 129, 142, 240  
Plautus, 242  
Plotinus, 153  
*Poems*, 50, 52, 56, 113  
'Poems on Children', 215-19  
'Poet Breaking Silence, To a', 169  
Poetry, 45, 48, 49, 124, 189, 209  
Pope, 184  
'Poppy, The', 58, 216  
Pre-Raphaelite, 111, 193  
Propertius, 253, 260  
Prose, 34 *et seq.*  
Psychology, 20, 84-5, 105-6, 122,  
179, 221-7, 248, 255 *et seq.*  
  
RAMSAY, M. P., 151-2  
Reality, 48, 79-81, 139 *et seq.*, 169,  
172-6, 220, 221

- Renaissance, 75, 149, 167, 184, 240, 242  
 'Retrospect', 58  
 Rhetoric, 36-8, 48, 50 *et seq.*, 58  
 Rhyme, 57, 67, 68, 181  
 Rhythm, 67, 68, 72-3, 81, 91  
 'Rhodes, Cecil, Ode on', 31  
 Rimbaud, 76, 78  
 Ritual, 53-4, 103, 111, 229  
 Ronsard, 240, 260  
 Rossetti, 57-8, 102, 193
- ST. BERNARD, 105, 153  
 St. Bonaventure, 153  
 St. Catherine of Genoa, 53  
 St. Francis, 101-2, 208-12  
 St. Ignatius, 18, 35, 40, 158  
 St. John of the Cross, 53, 163, 240  
 St. Paul, 86, 167  
 St. Teresa, 53, 123, 240, 249, 262  
 Sanctity, 197 *et seq.*, 244, 246  
 Sappho, 249, 251, 261  
 'Scala Jacobi', 57, 111  
 Science, 48-9, 51-2, 65, 152, 172-3, 183, 189, 195-6, 197 *et seq.*  
 'Sere of the Leaf', 56, 59  
 'Setting Sun, Ode to the', 27, 90-2, 104, 107, 164-5, 191, 195, 196, 197  
 Shakespeare, 24, 51, 54, 55, 59, 61, 68, 77, 90, 119, 127-8, 147, 151, 164, 195, 214, 242, 260, 261, 262  
 Shelley, 49, 55-6, 59, 68, 77, 90, 125 *et seq.*, 182, 185, 187, 191, 192, 208, 219, 224, 244  
 'Shelley', by F. T., 27, 46, 129-36  
 'Shelley', by L. Stephen, 46  
 Sidney, 240  
 'Sister Songs', 29, 50, 52, 58, 59, 62, 66, 83, 89-90, 119-21, 180, 192, 199, 218-20  
 Sitwell, S., 193  
 Sitwells, the, 214  
 Sleep and Death, 171-4  
 Sneed-Cox, J. G., 26  
 'Snow-flake, To a', 56  
 'Song of the Hours', 56  
 'Song of Youth and Age', 53  
 Spanish elements, 38, 75, 77, 163, 239-41, 253, 262  
 Spenser, 184, 240  
 Spinoza, 129, 152  
 Stephen, Sir L., 44-6  
 Storrington Priory, 27  
 Style, prose, 34 *et seq.*, 41, 47, 150-1, 161; rhetorical, 36, 105, 22; and opium, 41, 55; force and excess, 68 *et seq.*, 98-100, 149 *et seq.*  
 Sully, 212  
 Swinburne, 57, 67, 181-2  
 Symbolism, 54, 64, 79 *et seq.*, 111, 136-7, 151, 158, 174, 179, 181-2, 193, 198 *et seq.*, 210, 223-6  
 Symonds, J. A., 248, 256
- TENNYSON, 54, 59, 75, 179, 183, 184, 189  
 Terence, 253  
 Theocritus, 107  
 Thompson, E. H., 26  
 Thompson, Francis: family, 17 *et seq.*; temperament, 19 *et seq.*, 54, 126, 136, 224; laudanum, 25, 31, 38, 41, 55, 177; salvation, 27 *et seq.*; appearance, 21-3, 27, 31-3, 177; thought, 35-9, 46-9, 52-4, 64-5, 92 *et seq.*, 207-10; influence, 60, 77-8; favourite images, 62-3, 81-4, 96-7, 115-6  
 Thompson, J., 184  
 Tibullus, 253  
 Time and Eternity, 137 *et seq.*, 163 *et seq.*, 168-71, 200  
 Tractarians, 53  
 Traherne, 108, 214  
 Transcendental, 69, 79-81, 102, 107, 124, 130, 140-2, 146, 152-60, 163, 172-6  
 Trinity of Beauty, 48  
 Troubadours, 57, 240-2

# INDEX

Turner, 181  
Tynan, K., 26, 57

UNDERHILL, E., 154, 208  
Ushaw, 20, 21, 54

VAUGHAN, 76, 77, 108 *et seq.*,  
199-201, 214  
Verhaeren, 262  
Verlaine, 78  
'Veteran of Heaven', 38  
Villon, 258  
Virgil, 183

WARTONS, the, 186  
Watts-Dunton, T., 67  
Welby, T. Earle, 181  
Whitman, W., 256  
Whitten, W., 30  
Winchilsea, Countess of, 186-7  
Woman, 57, 78 *et seq.*, 95 *et seq.*, 123,  
140, 166, 223-6, 242-3, 250, 254  
*et seq.*  
Wordsworth, 62, 68, 129, 182, 185,  
193, 208, 215, 216, 219  
YEATS, W. B., 142  
Young, 186